

View Points (Series III):

Women in 2014 Transition

A report on the concerns and demands of women
and civil society organizations in Afghanistan's 34 provinces



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- *Reconciliation with Taliban*
- *Transfer of security responsibility*
- *Presidential election*
- *Economic transition*

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About Afghanistan Watch

The Afghanistan Watch is an independent, non-governmental, non-political and a leading Afghan civil society organization registered with the Ministry of National Economy of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. It envisions a democratic, peaceful, tolerant and just society in which all citizens have equal opportunities to realize their human potentials.

Its mission is to undertake activities that will promote peace, justice, and a culture of mutual tolerance and respect for human rights in Afghanistan. As its core values the organization is strongly committed to democracy, justice, human rights, sustainable and balanced social and economic development of the country and impartiality, independence and professionalism as guiding principles of its activities.

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Afghanistan Women Council (AWC)



Future for Afghanistan Children Organization (FACO)



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Summary of the Report

This report provides an analysis of concerns and demands of women regarding reconciliation process with Taliban, and the overall military, political, and economic transition in 2014. The views and opinions aggregated in this report come from 7 regional conferences entitled “Women’s Mobilization, Political Participation and Leadership in Afghanistan’s Transition Period”, held during the months of October and November of 2013, in seven regions of Afghanistan namely Mazar-e-Sharif, Herat, Kabul, Bamiyan, Jalalabd, Kandahar and Badakhshan.

The rights of women and gender equality are a sensitive and challenging topic in Afghanistan. It has been at the forefront of conflict between the traditionalist and conservative forces and the modernists from the early twentieth century in the country. The conservatives consider any changes in the lifestyles of women which would elevate their social position as an anti-Islamic threat, and they resort to public mobilization to reverse any of such trends from shaping. In the current era with the progress made to improve the legal and political status of women in the past decade, concerns exist that the women’s rights would be compromised during reconciliation with Taliban. Much of Afghan women’s hard-won gains risk being reversed more than any time before.

With a number of major development taking place simultaneously such as the transfer of security responsibility to the Afghan forces, and the transfer of political power for the first time since 2001, from President Karzai to the next president who will be elected in 2014, and the economic transition of country, moving away from its reliance on foreign aid to its internal resources, have brought fresh concerns for women. While the withdrawal of foreign forces will

be completed by the end of 2014, warlords, and local political players see an opportunity presenting itself for maneuvering in the political arena. It is not far from doubt that the Taliban and armed government opposition will look for unilateral political dealings that would provide new challenges to the social status of women.

Afghanistan Watch’s Mobilization and Political Participation Program

With this in mind, Afghanistan Watch has undertaken a national program to mobilize and enhance the political participation of women in the political transition that is taking place currently. The program strives to counter the current that would pose threats or to reverse gains made in this area in the past 12 years. Afghanistan Watch hopes that by establishing coordination networks and organizing consultative conferences to gather views of women, it has taken effective steps to voice concerns of women to the government and International Community. Thus, Afghanistan Watch has been able to establish a national network of civil society organizations mainly led and managed by women. In every major regions of Afghanistan, in total seven regions, a local focal point organization runs the program through its contact organization in the neighboring provinces.

In addition to building the women’s national network, AW has organized a series of consultative conferences aimed at gathering views and opinions of women. The seven conferences held in the seven regions were attended by participants from all provinces in the country.

Four main issues were put into discussion during the conferences such as reconciliation with Taliban, the presidential election, security and economic transitions.

The discussions took place with presence of staff of directorates of women affairs and regional offices of Afghanistan's Independent Human Rights Commission. Each conference had also sent out a declaration expressing concerns and demands of women. These demands and concerns expressed by women from 34 provinces have been aggregated and will be conveyed to the government officials and the International Community in the national conference which is expected to be held at the 2th of March 2014.

Women's views and demands:

The following paragraphs explain the major points gathered from declarations, questionnaires and interviews carried out with women at leadership positions. Therefore this report is containing the views of around 600 women who have participated in seven regional conferences. Additionally, the questionnaires responded by the participants and 12 in-depth interviews with women involved in the four above-mentioned areas which were also the themes of the conferences.

The declarations released during the conferences convey the major demands and concerns of women. These declarations in general call upon the government to live up to its commitment with adherence to and implementation of provisions of the Afghan Constitution, and the international conventions that it is a signatory to. Moreover, protection of these laws and hurdles against the implementation of them must be tackled, for instance the Afghan Parliament must pass the Elimination of Violence against Women (EVAW) law.

Accordingly, the participants underlined the importance of support and legal assurance for women during talks and reconciliation with the Taliban. The government must put respect to women's rights as a pre-condition, in addition to the respect for the Afghan Constitution and civil laws of the country by the government opposition. Furthermore, the government must ensure the full participation of women in the Peace Council and reintegration process of Taliban. More importantly, the Taliban style of Sharia punishment and executions must be prohibited.

The participants have called upon the government and the Independent Election Commission to take on initiatives for wider public awareness, encouraging the participation of women in the election. In the similar fashion, civil society organizations must initiate countrywide campaigns of public awareness and exert pressure on the presidential candidates and candidates for the provincial councils to prioritize issues of women in their platforms and policies as well as providing their clear programs for improving the conditions of women. Furthermore, the women rights activists must start public awareness campaigns by establishing networks with the women who are in the leadership and policy making positions and experts at the national level, in regards issues concerning reconciliation with Taliban.

Furthermore, the needs of women and women run organizations should be identified, categorized and prioritized. Conflicts and threats during the transition period and beyond 2014 should be identified for preparedness and activities must be focused on the latent consequences of the process. In addition, those human rights defending organizations should identify current laws and procedures which direct or indirectly violate women's rights, and undertake actions through legal channels in order to modify them.

The participants have also placed emphasis on protection of laws which provide privileges for women such as political participation. An example of this is having a quota for seats in the parliament and provincial councils, and further laws such as "Elimination of Violence against Women", and "Afghanistan Women's Action Program". Any changes that would undermine or weaken these laws must be dealt with effectively.

In regards with security transition, in addition to the attention paid to security sector, the pivotal role of women in the good governance, rule of law, reforms in the government institutions, particularly the justice sector, economic development and human resources capacity building must not be neglected. Moreover, attention must be given to raise the number and presence of women in the national police force as part of long term recruitment and training process.

:Part 1

Introduction: Conceptualization, Objectives, and Organizing the Program



1. Program objectives

The main objective of the “Mobilization and Participation of Women in Afghanistan’s Political Transition” program was aimed at provision of support and protection to the women’s rights during the current political transition and to bolster their participation in the major decision making, especially in mobilizing women’s participation in the rural areas of the country where women grapple with increasing challenges. Coordination and the national level for advocacy of women’s rights among networks, organizations and activist, in cities and villages through the local networks are the main objective of the project.¹

Efforts have been put in the program to gather views, concerns, and recommendations of women’s rights activists from different provinces of Afghanistan. Furthermore, the program aims at creating a single national platform for the same purpose. The platform will collect views of rights activists in seven regions and hold a national conference.

The objective here is to bring up to the surface the views gathered in the regional and national conferences and set it in the national agenda to protect and support rights for women and the gains made in this area in the last decade. In addition, the demands and recommendations coming from women will be used a reference point for transition

period and as guide for policy making in the Afghan government, reconciliation with Taliban, platforms of presidential nominees for 2014 election, and approach of International Community regarding Afghanistan.

Afghanistan Watch expects that these activities will be able to 1) help formulation of policy recommendation at the national level to enhance women’s legal rights in the transition period, 2) result in mobilization of women’s rights activists and organization at the national level, 3) trigger the internal and international organizations’ sensitivities, and lastly, 4) to enhance the capacities of networking and collective work by rights advocates and organizations.

2. Establishing organizations’ network and coordination of women’s activities (local focal points)

As sporadic and intermittent efforts will only focus on small areas, and remain inadequate to improve the situation of women’s rights in the country, it is therefore necessary for a long-term process and the use of current potentials to establish coordination and cooperation among local civil society organizations. To this end, Afghanistan Watch in an effort towards decentralization of activities, has selected seven civil society organizations from seven major regions of the country for collecting views in this area.

1. Local focal organizations list can be referred to in the annex.

The nature of Afghanistan Watch's partnership with the local coordinating organizations has been based on mutual cooperation providing local organization the discretion to manage the regional conferences in each zone. This type of cooperation has enhanced the reflection of diverse views, and has provided the ground for collective work towards establishing a national network covering the whole country.

3. Women's views and demands; regional/provincial consultative conferences

The consultative conferences were held in seven major region of Afghanistan respectively in the provinces of Mazar-e-Sharif, Herat, Kabul, Bamiyan, Jalalabad, Kandahar, and Badakhshan. The conference were attended by women's rights advocates, directors and representatives of women right organizations from the provinces in the region.

In all of the conferences speakers were invited from the directorates of women affairs, and the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission. The heads of these organizations have served as speakers and they were sent invitations and the agenda for conferences at least three weeks in advance to prepare for the topics of discussion. Likewise, local focal point organizations have asked the participants to come prepared on the issues which would be discussed. The conference facilitators have also provided their presentations on three main following issues.

1. Assessment of progress and achievements in the areas of women's rights in Afghanistan in terms of laws, political participation and serving in the decision making capacities, and the social status of women in the urban and rural areas.
2. Assessment of political transition in 2014, focusing on reconciliation with Taliban, security transition, presidential election, and economic transition.

3. Assessment of concerns regarding the condition of women in post-2014 Afghanistan.

Each of the seven conference were attended by 60-100 participants comprising of civil society activists, and women rights defending organizations.² In the beginning of each conference the participants would elect a board. Following the speakers and facilitators presentations, the participants were divided into several working groups and would alternatively talk on the three main topics included in the agenda, and would report the results of the discussions to the board. The board would then aggregate the overall results of the discussions into the conference declarations.

In the meantime, the participants would also appoint several women's rights advocates in a democratic fashion to represent the region in the upcoming national conference in the capital Kabul. At the end of each conference, the declaration of the conference was released to the media as well as a giving a session to the press. It is worth noting that reports on the conference were widely broadcast on national and international media outlets.³

3.1. Questionnaires

In order to get precise views of the participants on issues, a multiple choice⁴ questionnaire was developed for their responses. The questionnaire presented seven questions with multiple answers to the participants to choose from in order to respond to the question.

For the purpose of privacy and complete freedom to express their views, the questionnaire did not require the respondents to mention their names. Furthermore, additional space has been provided for the respondents to write any additional views they have if the multiple choice answers do not

2. List of conference speakers in each region can be referred to in the annex

3. Links of reports from conferences in the media can be found at Afghanistan Watch's website: www.watchafghanistan.org

4. Refer to the annexes for the detailed questionnaire

suffice their response. The results of the survey and its analysis have been laid out in details in the third section of the report.

3.2. Exclusive Interviews

Additionally, Afghanistan Watch has interviewed around 12 well-known women leaders in Afghanistan during the period that the conferences were taking place in the regions.⁵ During the interview these women leaders have been asked about their views regarding 2014 and the transition period beyond that.

The methodology used in the interviews was to ask open-ended questions with providing opportunity for the interviewees to express their personal experience, the challenges against improvement of women's lives in the last decade, and recommendations for overcoming these problems in the transition period. This reports contains answers provided during the exclusive interviews, and references the individuals who have been interviewed.

3.3. Literature Review

In order to create a standard structure for the report of the regional conferences, a literature review of political, social and cultural context of Afghanistan, and the background of women's struggle for their rights, as well as the counter-currents of conservatism during different historical periods was studied. The report goes over them briefly.

The overview of women's struggle in the twentieth century will provide a valuable insight for the women's rights activists, and highlights the importance the problematic nature of these struggle and the lessons that need to be drawn from them. The second section of the report is the literature review providing historical background as well as the challenges to the progress in the areas of women's rights in the last 12 years.

4. Advocacy for women's demands; voicing women's views

The outcome of the regional and national conferences are published through reports, declarations, media clips, as well as use of social media such as the Facebook, Twitter, and the e-email groups and women's rights networks. The first audience for these publications is policy makers in Kabul and the international stakeholders who are in positions to exert pressure on the government for policy changes and prioritizing women's issues.

Afghanistan Watch has a rich experience in publication of newsletters, especially in regards with transitional justice and human rights, for attracting wider media reflection of these efforts. Additional meetings among the women network member for exchange of views will take place for follow-up purposes and to strengthen the current dynamics that have been built.

Finally, Afghanistan Watch will follow up the current efforts in consultation with local networks to disseminate and publicize the findings, recommendations, and declarations of these conferences. Further meetings will be held with relevant institutions such as the High Peace Council, the Transition Committee, and the Women Commission in the Parliament, international institutions, and foreign organizations in Kabul.

⁵. List of exclusive interviews can be found at annexes.

Part 2:

Achievements, and Challenges of Afghan Women in the Last 12 Years (2001-2014)



The struggle for women's rights has been the most politicized social issue in the contemporary history of Afghanistan. In the early twentieth century, the modernist King, Amanullah Khan, was overthrown by religious and tribal forces, simply because a picture of the Queen, not wearing scarf, was distributed in the tribal areas of the country. The religious leaders have declared that the King's support for women's emancipation was in contradiction to Sharia, and accused of him of blasphemy. Those rebelling against the King maintained that "under-age marriage was allowed, the women should not leave the house for education, and polygamy for a man to marry four wives was permissible. Furthermore, all schools for girls to be closed, and those girls sent to Turkey for study to be recalled home, and the Hijab, covering of women body should be re-instituted."¹

Such opposition had not ceased for the decades to come. In yet another incident, in 1959, during the Independence Day's celebration, the appearance of women without the headscarves, have caused rebellions in Kandahar but was quashed by the well-armed government forces. This has also provided an opportunity for women to continue their public presence, attending schools, universities, and working as government employees without having headscarves. In addition, this was an opportunity for successful reform in the areas of women's rights

with the government having been able to control the discontents.² However, in 1963, religious conservatives have welcomed the resignation of Prime Minister Daud Khan, creating fresh concerns for women.³

One of the reasons for rebellions against the leftist government in late 1970s was the reform decrees intended for the realization of "Cultural Revolution". The decree #7, in 1978, has ordered the gender equality and abolition of dowry, which faced with stiff opposition of Mullahs and conservative forces, instigating public unrest.⁴

In the 1990s, during the Majaheedin rule and then the Taliban, the women did not only lose their complete freedom, but they constituted to remain the main victims of the civil war. The Taliban issued decrees which banned women from rights to education, or even leaving their houses. They believed the working domain of women was limited to their homes.⁵ The Taliban considered the presence of women in public causing disorder and thus being against Sharia.⁶

2. Farhang, Mir Mohammad Sediq, *Afghanistan in the Last Five Centuries*, Second volume, Irfan publication, Tehran, 1989. P. 688

3. Dupree, Louise, *Afghanistan*, Oxford University 1997, Chapter 24

4. Azam Sistani, Mohammad, *Saur Revoulution and Its Consequences on Afghanistan*, Second publication, Kabul. P. 96

5. Pazira, Nilofar, *Afghan Women; Century of Struggle for Equality*. Translated by Asadullah Shafai. *Afghansitan Studies Quarterly*. Issue 3 and 2. 2001

6. Dupree, Nancy, *Afghan Women under the Taliban Regime*, Taliban and Global Politics. P. 206

1. Ghoobar, Mir Gholam, *Afghanistan's History*, Second volume, Jamhori publication, Tehran, P. 1254-1255



Mazare-Sharif Conference-Afghanistan Watch

1. Progress and Achievements for Women's Rights

The new Afghan Constitution enacted by the Loya Jirga (Grand Assembly) of 2004, has provided guarantees for the gender equality through articles 22, 44, and 54. The Constitution provides legal basis for political participation of women. In addition to this, Afghanistan has become signatory to the international conventions such as the Committee on Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), in 2003, International Conventions and Civil and Political Rights, and the International Convention on Economic and Cultural Rights. This obliges the government to take legal action for respect and abundance of women's rights.

In signing all of these treaties and conventions, Afghanistan expressed its commitment to respecting the women's rights. Particularly in the Afghanistan Compact⁷ in the London conference (2006, and National Development Strategy (2008-2013). The Afghan government has introduced in 2007, a long-

term strategy under the National Action Program for Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA), 2007-2017, which is aiming at establishing a framework for the implementation of action programs, among them the Tokyo conference commitments (2012) for sustainability of economic aid to Afghanistan beyond the transition period, demonstrating the resolution of the International Community in defense of women's rights.

During the last decade the women have been able to work alongside men in senior government and non-government positions. The growing participation of women can be attributed to the Afghan Constitution providing legal basis and the support provided by the International Community.

Presently, 22 percent members of lower house of the parliament, 68 women, and 17 percent of the upper house, 47 seven women, and 25 percent membership in the provincial councils are comprised of women. Furthermore, 22 percent of total government employees are women, and women working at

7. *Afghanistan Compact*

the managerial position is currently 9 percent. The government has expressed its commitment to raise the inclusion of women in the government to 30 percent through NAPWA⁸ program, by 2018.

Prominent examples demonstrating the importance of women's legal status is shown in the establishment of Afghanistan's Independent Human Rights Commission, and the Ministry of Women Affairs. The Ministry of Women Affairs is providing oversight over gender policies in Afghanistan and its mission includes the growth of a society devoid of violence against women, growth of women's human potential, bolstering the participation of women in the leadership positions and access to opportunities, and provision of services to them. The ministry defines itself as a bridge between the women and the government which on the one hand it is defending the women's rights and interests and on the other hand it is mobilizing the human potential of women for participation in the government.⁹ In Afghanistan's Independent Human Rights Commission, in addition to the head of the commission, three of its nine commissioners are women. Having local offices all over the country, the commission has turned into an important organization for the defense of women's rights.¹⁰

The directorate of gender in the civil services commission is working to expand recruitment of women in the government agencies while also obliging the government ministries to establish gender improvement sections. However, the women rights advocates are concerned that with reduced presence of international community in the country, the government will not be able to increase the participation of women to 30 percent by 2018. Even if the quota is satisfied, it will not show the women's presence in the leadership positions.

During the last 12 years, opportunities have existed for higher education for women inside and outside Afghanistan. Still, a large number of women with higher

education cannot work either in the government or non-government agencies due to lack of security.

However, in the past decade, the women have accessed senior political positions previously monopolized by men. Ms. Sima Samar, was one of four presidential deputies during the transitional government period (2001-2004), and later on as the head of Afghanistan's Independent Human Rights Commission (2004-present). In 2005, Ms. Habiba Sorabi, was the first-ever woman governor in Afghanistan appointed as the governor of Bamiyan province. And in 2009, Ms. Ozra Jafari, became the first-ever woman mayor in Nilli of Daikundi province. Ms. Soraya Shakib, was appointed as first-ever district chief for Jauzjan province. In addition to this, women also occupy leading positions in the ministries of women affairs, ministry of health, and ministry of martyrs and handicapped, serving as ministers.

Similarly, the presence of women in the legal executive branch has remarkably increased. In 2013, 1705 women served in police uniforms. In the same year, the number of women serving in the positions of judges reached to 66, and 300 serving as defense lawyers, and 250 as prosecutors.¹¹ A prominent example is Ms. Marya Bashir who serves as attorney general in Herat province, a position for the first time filled by a woman.

The organizations currently operating in the country can act as an important network in advocating women's rights. If we look at the figure from the women nominees winning the parliamentary elections, it shows that the civil society has supported to mobilize women for political participation.¹²

By 2013, 1,700 non-government organizations (NGOs) were active in Afghanistan, and 1,300 social organizations were registered, most of them direct or indirectly involved in providing support for women. The ministry of women affairs has registered 248 women's

8. National Action Plan for Women of Afghanistan. <http://sgdatabse.unwomen.org/uploads/National%20Action%20Plan%20for%20the%20Women%20of%20Afghanistan%202007%20to%202017.pdf>

9. Website of Ministry of Women Affairs. <http://mowa.gov.af/fa/page/1337>

10. Website of Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission. <http://www.aihrc.org.af>

11. Oxfam's report on "Women and the Afghan Police" <http://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/bp-173-afghanistan-women-police-100913-en.pdf>

12. Alizada, Laila. *The Role of Government Policies, Political Parties, Civil Society in Women's Election Campaigns in Herat. Women Political Participation in the Previous Election Booklet*. Published by Afghanistan Watch. 2012

rights advocacy organizations.¹³ It is estimated that around 5,000 people work in these NGOs.¹⁴

The result of works by these organizations in the health and education sectors direct or indirectly affect the conditions of women in the country. Improvement in the human development indicators primarily affects the women in society. The women mortality rate during birth was 1600 per 100,000 births – which was the highest number in the world. That figure was lowered by 327 incidents in 2010, showing a remarkable progress.¹⁵

2. Challenges

Women's participation in the political, cultural and social structures of the society has not been institutionalized yet, and the gains made in the recent years are susceptible to reverse. Political factions and the government are only paying lip service to gain attention of the international community about the women's rights.

The reasons why the international community's aid have not be used in the best ways can be attributed to the reason that only a limited number of individuals exploit them.¹⁶ In addition, the international aid has been given in the forms of projects. These projects have been based on the designs and choices of funding agencies rather than Afghan-run organizations. Usually these organizations do not receive independent operational budget from the Afghan government or other aid agencies in order to sustain their activities independently.¹⁷ Therefore, most of the women's rights advocacy organizations have no back-up budget, and cannot sustain without international aid support. Meanwhile, lack of coordination among organizations has caused dispersion of focus, and projects on specific

areas, lacking major pressure on policies.

With the 2014 already starting, the conservative forces in the government and parliament are determined to reverse the women's progress in the last 12 years, by modifying laws.¹⁸ The reduction in quota of women councilors in the provincial councils in the elections, from ¼ to 1/5 passed by both houses of parliament in June of 2013 and approved by President Karzai in July of that same year, is an example of such counter-currents. While the Afghan Constitution has not provided the 25 percent quota, the lower house of the parliament has initially passed it, however it was turned down by the conservative senate members and was reduced to 1/5 of the provincial council members. It was as if they were sworn enemies of women's rights to get the quota declined to 20 percent.¹⁹

The Shiites Personal Status law which has been provided by article 61 of the constitution was drafted by conservative Shia religious scholars and was passed by the Parliament in 2009. However, objections made by the international community and the NATO's Secretary General have directed attention to the matter which was trampling women's rights. The violation of rights included, husband's right to have sex with his wife without her consent, giving men the right to become guardian of their children after the divorce. Widespread objections against the law as was termed in the western media as the "rape law",²⁰ has pressured President Karzai to veto its approval. Later on, members of the parliament have confessed that they passed the law without reading its details.

The Elimination of Violence against Women (EVAW) law which was operational by a presidential decree was proposed to the parliament for approval. The conservative members of the parliament have opposed and undermined a number of provisions of the law from being approved in the lower house by calling the law being in contradiction to Islam. The (EVAW) law provides definitions of rape and sexual

13. Website of Ministry of Women Affairs. <http://mowa.gov.af/fa/page/6814>

14. Website of Ministry of Economy. List of registered non-government organizations (NGOs)

15. Website of Ministry of Health. <http://moph.gov.af/fa/Page/8968>

16. A participant in Kunduz regional conference

17. Operational budget

18. Afghan religious scholars' decree can be referred to in the annex.

19. Statement made by Soraya Sobhrang, from Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, in Kabul's regional conference

20. Rape law

harassments of women, which the Afghan civil law fell short to define it previously. Despite campaigning by women's rights activists, which continues to date, and President Karzai's support by signing the petition, the Parliament has not been able to pass the law. The rights activists are concerned that the existing controversies surrounding the law will prevent the judges to refer to it in the legal processes. The law will extensively help women in all aspects of their lives, and its stagnation in the parliament is a step back as it will give raise to the incidents of violence against women. A number of women's rights activists, accuse parliament of extremism.²¹

In the summer of 2013, a number of MPs in the parliament have requested for adding an article to the criminal codes of Afghanistan which was discrediting the testimony of close family members in the event of family violence. Family violence is the most prevalent form of violence against women in the country.

In the same manner, in the last months of 2013, a number of MPs in the Parliament have asked for modifying the criminal codes by adding the provision for stoning those found guilty of having illegal sexual relations. It followed with objection of the civil society organizations. While the ministry of justice has not officially approved the law, but it is possible that it is being used as a tool by the religious conservatives to create public fear from Sharia punishments, as the Taliban do it in the districts under their control.

These experiences prove that legal privileges and supports are easily reversible. If the legal privileges do not receive consistent support of civil society and the international community, with the declining role of international community, kangaroo courts punishing on the basis of Sharia in the far-flung districts will be increased, and the government will not be able to resist against the Taliban and conservative elements.

In some countries such as Morocco, women experts in the religious affairs have been able to resist against the use of superstitions and patriarchal interpretation

of religion.²² Instead they are introducing an image of Islam which provides rights and freedom for women. In Afghanistan, the lack of women religious experts critically require their presence.

Afghanistan is one of the most dangerous place for women on the planet in terms of health, violence, and access to the economic resources.²³ Violence against women is a recurring story, as if it has turned into a tradition in the society and households which calls only for silence. The government institutions are also neglectful of their legal obligations unless a strong public outcry takes place, and then the government is the last institution that reacts and for politicians to enter into the drama, while many cases as such takes place and the police turn a blind eye at them.

During 2013, the rate of violence against women have accelerated raising fresh concerns. According to the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, the incident of violence has increased 24.7 percent in 2013.²⁴ The violence have taken place in very brutal forms which is very particular to the context of Afghanistan. These women have usually fallen victims of violence by the powerful individuals, warlords, and Kangaroo trials by Sharia law.

The safe shelters for women which provides safe havens for those fleeing violence, have also been attacked by the conservative Mullahs by calling them the places of prostitution. The defenders of women's rights are concerned that with the reduced presence of international forces, protection of safe shelters will become difficult. The police do not consider themselves responsible for their security and there also concerns of police involvement in incidents of rape in these houses. Violence against women does not restrict to ordinary women but it also includes threats against women employees, professionals, representative in the provincial councils, and parliament.

22. Please refer to the Afghan religious scholars' decree in the annex.

23. Deutsche Welle news agency. Afghanistan, the Most Dangerous Country for Women. <http://www.dw.de>

24. BBC News. http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/afghanistan/2013/12/131214_mar_children_ayoub_undp_report.shtml

21. Afghanistan Watch's exclusive interview with Ms. Habiba Sorabi, former governor of Bamiyan province, and vice presidential nominee.

Part three:

Women's Mobilization and Participation during the Transition Period



Afghanistan has begun its transition era following the Bonn Conference of 2001. The current transition process will be ended by 2014, marking either the failure of success of the Afghans and the International Community. Four areas of the transition period mutually affecting each other are broken down in the following manner:

1. Reduction/withdrawal of international forces, and transfer of security responsibilities to Afghan forces.

2. Presidential and provincial council's elections on 5 April 2015, marking the first democratic transition in Afghanistan's history.

3. Reconciliation with Taliban and political solution to the conflict which may result in power sharing¹, or giving power for controlling some areas of the country², or modification of Afghanistan's Constitutions and progress made in the areas of women's rights, in order to conciliate with Taliban's agenda.

4. Economic transition, following reduction in the amount of international economic aid, and impacts of efforts towards self-sufficiency on the social and political engagement of women.

1. Power sharing

2. Territorial sharing

1. Women's Rights in Reconciliation with Taliban

Every war will have to end one day, and reconciliation can occur at the end conflicts. Afghanistan is not exception to the case. With the assessments made regarding Taliban, the nature of their insurgency is chronic and will last longer, even though they cannot pose serious threat to the government in Kabul or the international peace. For the Westerners, the transition period without a political settlement with Taliban seems incomplete, and for Afghans security is an important issue which the government should soon initiate a national reconciliation program.

Reconciliation with Taliban is taking place at high and low levels in the past few years. In the low level, the reintegration program aims at providing an opportunity for armed groups to lay down their weapons and return to normal life. The Peace Office, headed by Sibghatullah Mujadadi, has been able to reintegrate about 7,000 armed Taliban to normal life.

At the higher level, talks with the leadership of Taliban and considering the Taliban as a political group, is led by the Peace Commission, headed by Salahudin Rabani. While President Karzai has requested on several occasions for Taliban's leader Mullah Omar for negotiation, but the Taliban has constantly been calling the government in Kabul as a stooge of foreigners and have shown little interest for negotiation. So far no progress has been made

regarding official talks with the group.³

Women's rights advocates want the government to assure that any dealings with the Taliban will have to guarantee security for work, social and political participation of women. The rights and freedom of women must not be jeopardized.

1.1. Talibanization of Society and Expansion of Violence

In the survey from women's rights activists conducted by Afghanistan Watch during the regional conferences, in regards with concerns about the consequences of reconciliation with Taliban, 47 percent of the respondents called increasing social and employment restrictions, and decreasing economic opportunities, as their main concerns. 28 percent of the respondents expressed concern from implementation of Taliban's laws and raise in violence against women, 10 percent of those answering said they worried from women's restriction from politics, and 10 percent have said they were concerned about the modification of the constitution.

According to the Taliban's decrees, the women cannot leave their houses without being accompanied by a close family member. Reinstating such restrictions will be a nightmare for women, especially those working outside their homes. Taliban strictly oppose women working in the government, internal or external non-government organizations. Teachers and women employees of government and non-government organizations have been receiving night letters signed by local Taliban commanders warning them to leave their jobs or else they will be killed or kidnapped. There have been several incidents of assassination of women's rights activists in the previous years.

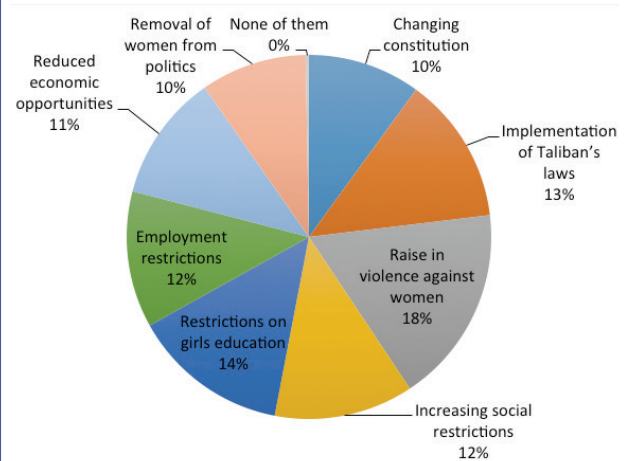
With the support of religious scholars, access to basic human rights, will become easier. Unfortunately in Afghanistan it has not been the case. The most

3. Some diplomatic efforts has raised Taliban's willingness for negotiation in the recent years, an important part of which was opening a political office for Taliban in Qatar in June 2013. While opening an office with the Taliban representatives was an official address for the Taliban since their toppling in 2001, but erecting their flag was somehow revealing their efforts of international recognition which faced with serious criticism of President Karzai. He has asked for negotiations to start inside Afghanistan.

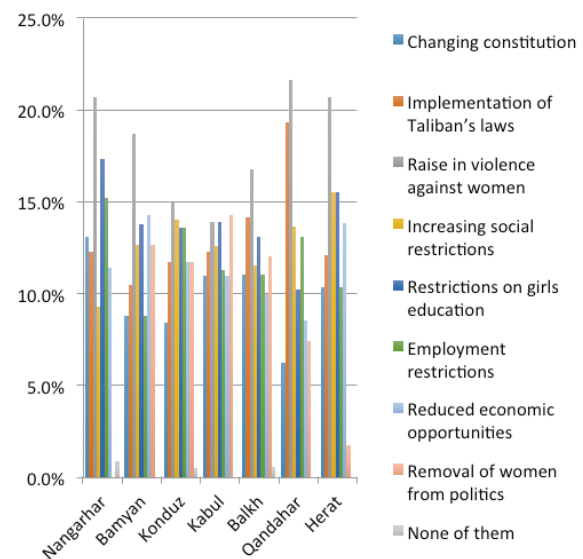
Chart 1:

What are your main concerns regarding reconciliation with Taliban and its impact on the situations of women?

A) National level



B) According to the regions



conservative religious scholars are members of the leadership of religious scholars' council, who have not only remained reluctant to support from the women's rights in the past decade, but has become a challenge against women. In the spring of 2012, the religious scholars' council has issued a decree which said the women were subordinate to men and that they should not work in mixed work spaces with men. Furthermore, they should be accompanied by a male

close relative while travelling. This decree is in sharp agreement with views of Taliban.

The Talibanization of laws is far more concerning than the Taliban themselves reclaiming power and re-establishing the Islamic emirate, which seems an impossibility at the moment. The Talibanization with a degree of approval by the government is aimed at closing the distance between the open society and the Taliban's ideal society, and presenting an opportunity for the conservative forces to implement Sharia law based on Taliban's interpretation.

The Afghan women may never forget the brutality of Taliban's religious police, the office of prevention of vice and promotion of virtue.⁴ In the regional conference held in eastern region, Nilofar Aziz, a member of provincial council from Nangarhar, has called peace with Taliban as agonizing and said the women will fall victims of the peace process. The final declaration of the conference said: "The peace process with Taliban and armed government opposition has been overshadowed by political agendas which is in contradiction with nationally accepted values."

The Taliban have never accepted Afghanistan's new Constitution. In fact, there was no such a document as a constitution during their Islamic Emirate rule (from 1996-2001). It was only Mullah Omar's decrees that were issued to restrict the behaviors of men and women. The Taliban decrees did not provide any rights or freedom for women.

The Taliban wants implementation of Sharia in its strictest form.⁵ In the districts where the presence of central government is minimal, Taliban judges are implementing the Sharia law punishing women with complete brutality. With the 2014 already beginning, conservatives in the government and parliament are trying to reverse the progress made in the last 12 years, by brining modifications to the laws.

The government of Afghanistan is pursuing a dual

4. Promotion of virtue and prevention of vice

5. Mullah Omar's decree regarding treatment of women by doctors. See the annex.

policy, responding both to the Taliban and the International Community. In announcing its official policies, the government stresses on the protection from women's rights, but de facto⁶, it has opened the space for Taliban and conservative circles to gradually restrict women's freedom through legal mechanisms, and it has remained silent over the brutal implementation of Taliban's Sharia law in the provinces and districts.

1.2. Transparency and Participation in the Peace Talks

Transparency in the peace process with Taliban is important not only for women but for all members of the society and political groups. The most important part is no real start off of the talks. While open and secret meetings and agreements with the Taliban members has been taking place, only in late November 2013, the head of Afghanistan's Peace Council has met with Mullah Brother, the second in command of Taliban in Pakistan.

If opportunities are provided to take practical steps towards negotiation and the parties enter into talks⁷, the participation of women's rights activists in the process is a mechanism to prevent from compromising women's rights.

Although, the High Peace Council has in general been directed by President Karzai, the council comprise of 71 members, among them 9 women mainly involved in public relations and media, with limited role in the leadership and policy making of the council. Monisa Shirzada Hassan, a member of the council, has said during the regional conference in Kabul that "The role of women should not be symbolic in the society", therefore they need to actively take part in various areas for improving their conditions.

6. De facto

7. The sources to negotiate with Taliban is not clear. President Karzai insists that the high peace council under his personal supervision, is the only authorized source for negotiation. However, political parties outside the government are also in contacts with Taliban and try to enter in direct talks with them. On 21 December 2012, the Taliban representatives and Afghanistan political opposition leaders have held a meeting in Paris about conditions for peace and Afghanistan's political future. The Taliban representative called the meeting as clarifying the official position of women towards international community. They said, the Afghan constitution must be rewritten based on the Islamic Sharia laws. Officially the Taliban have called to negotiate with the US only.

1.3. Resistance to Compromise

Responding to the survey, rights advocates and heads of women organizations in response to Afghanistan Watch's survey on preventing the possible consequences of the reconciliation with Taliban, 31 percent believed that reconciliation should be based on the condition to protect women's rights, 26 percent asked for inclusion of women in the peace process, 26 percent of them have called for transparency in the peace process. 16 percent of the respondents have asked for complete suspension of the peace talks.

Ms. Alima, director of Women's Political Participation Committee, believes the solution lies in collective resistance.

"I have always asked from women who were in the country during the Taliban regime why they have not raised their voice and did not protest. They say they were humiliated and publicly flogged. But, I think if the situation gets deteriorated, we should resist as a group. Individual resistance is futile as they will be able to crush them. But if this is a movement, the women collectively resist, no one can kill them all. I think we should not surrender easily, we have to resist."⁸

The survey further reveals that increasing violence against women is a major concern in all 7 major regional provinces, while implementation of Taliban laws were responded as main concerns in Kandahar and Mazar-e-Sharif, increase of social restriction in Herat and Kunduz, work restriction in Kabul, decrease of economic opportunities in Bamiyan, and the restriction on girls education in Nangarhar and Herat provinces.

Assuring women's rights in reconciliation with Taliban is a shared concern of women's rights activists and international community. However, it should not be forgotten that Taliban's view of women has an organic link with the identity of Taliban. To expect a sudden U-turn in their attitude is not realistic. Meanwhile, the importance of women's rights cannot let it be left out of any negotiation with Taliban.

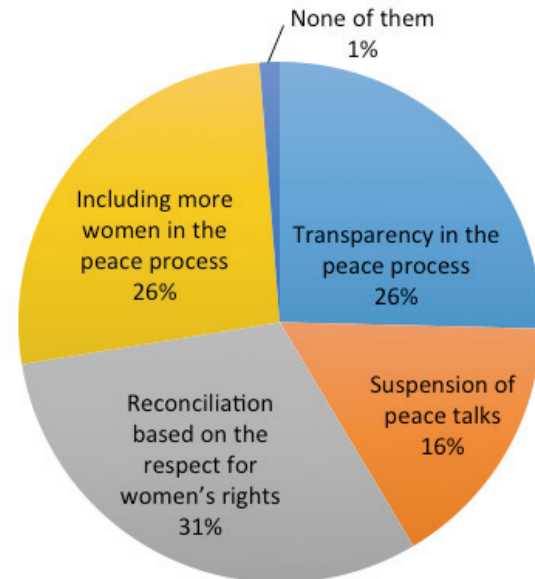
According to the survey in response to the question

8. Interview with Afghanistan Watch

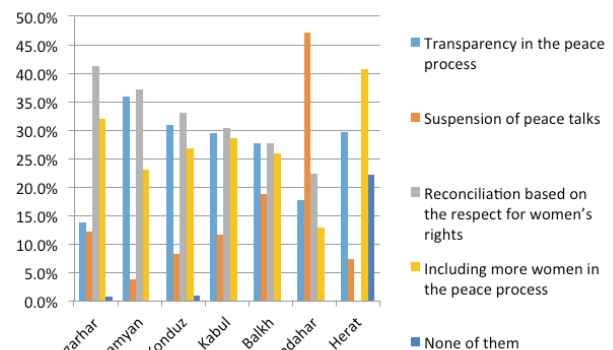
Chart 2:

What are your suggestions to prevent from unintended consequences of reconciliation with Taliban?

A) National level



B) According to the regions



how to prevent from the unintended consequences of talks with Taliban, most of the recommendations made in Kandahar was to stop peace talks, in Herat the respondents recommended inclusion of more women in the peace talks, and in Nangarhar the respondents suggested protection of rights as a condition for reconciliation. A number of women have also said that the experience from Taliban period is enough and that there is no need to ask again whether we want them or not.⁹

9. Zarghona Azizi, teacher at Mohragan Private School, Interview with Afghanistan Watch

In addition to the complicated nature of negotiation, granting Taliban privileges is a matter of concern for civil society and International Community. Ms. Fauzia Koofi, a Member of Parliament from Badakhshan province, is a critic of reconciliation with Taliban. According to her, reaching to a settlement with Taliban does not mean peace.

“Negotiation with Taliban does not mean reaching to a peace deal. First, the Taliban is not a political group, it is an ideological one, shaped by the intelligence agencies of neighboring countries. Second, it is a military group which is fighting currently. Therefore, giving privileges to an ideological and militaristic group will not result in peace. In fact, it damages the democratic process of public participation. If Taliban is considered a political group, it can participate in the government through political means such as election. But they are a military group that kill hundreds of people every day under the banner of Islam, and dozens of others in suicide attacks. So negotiating with a military and terroristic group does not result in bringing peace.”¹⁰

The women plea for commitment of the international community. Ms. Monisa, a member of High Peace Council, said, “We are calling on the international community that the current progress will not reverse, if they remain committed to their promises, and do not look for symbolic role of women in politics.”¹¹

Zahra Sepehr, a women’s right advocate, had the following view.

“Democracy in Afghanistan is still patriarchal. Talks with the Taliban occurs when they feel no respect for women’s rights. The role of women in the peace council is also a symbolic one. Unless we convince the government opposition that women and men have equal rights and that they must accept the current constitution and do not block the role of women in society, reconciliation with them is illogical.”¹²

10. Afghanistan Watch’s interview with Fauzia Koofi, Member of Parliament from Badakhshan, and head of women’s committee in the parliament. The interview entitled “negotiation with Taliban will not end in peace” can be found at Afghanistan Watch’s website. www.afghanistanwatch.org

11. Ms. Monisa Hasan’s speech at Kabul regional conference

12. Zahra Sepehr, director of Women’s Rights Advocacy organization in Kabul. Interview with Afghanistan Watch.

2. Women in Political Transition (Presidential Election 2014)

The third presidential and provincial council’s election will be held on 5th April 2014. These elections are important for the future of women’s political participation. In the meantime, 2014 also marks the beginning of “transformation decade”, which includes security, and economic transition of Afghanistan.

The 2014 election is the first-ever democratic transition of power in the history of Afghanistan. The current condition of women demonstrates the progress in political participation. The protection of women’s rights gained in the last decade is considered to be on the priorities of future president. The way out from the current crisis is expected to be the election whether a bad or a good one.¹³

2.1. Women’s Views on Transition of Government Administration

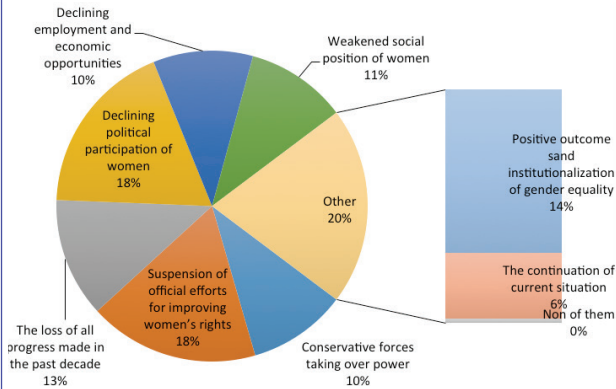
Afghanistan Watch’s survey of women’s rights advocates in 7 regions of the country suggest that concerns exist about the election and transition of power. 80 percent of respondents have expressed concerns, while 15 percent have expressed optimism about the 2014 election results in protecting women’s rights. Only 6 percent of the respondents believed the current situation will continue. The primary concerns of women for the period beyond 2014 was as following: 28 percent believed women’s political and social participation will decline, and 18 percent believed official efforts to improve the conditions of women will decline. 13 percent of the respondents believed the progress made in this area will reverse; and 10 percent believed that employment opportunities for women will decline.

In Kandahar and Herat provinces decline in official efforts to improve conditions of women was the primary concern, while it was less of a concern for Bamiyan. However, in Herat, Kabul, Bamiyan and Mazar-e-Sharif provinces, declined employment opportunities was the primary concern expressed.

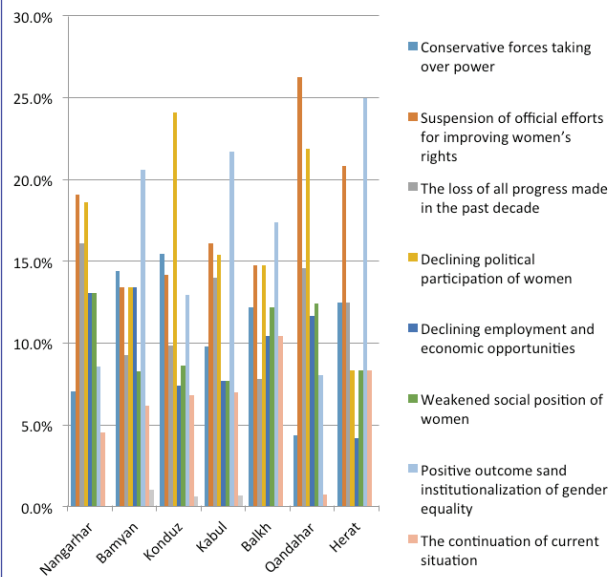
13. Soraya Sobhrang from Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, in Kabul’s regional conference

Chart 3:
What will be the impacts of the upcoming presidential election and changes in the government administration on the conditions of women?

A) National level



B) According to the regions



2.2. Women Demands from the future president

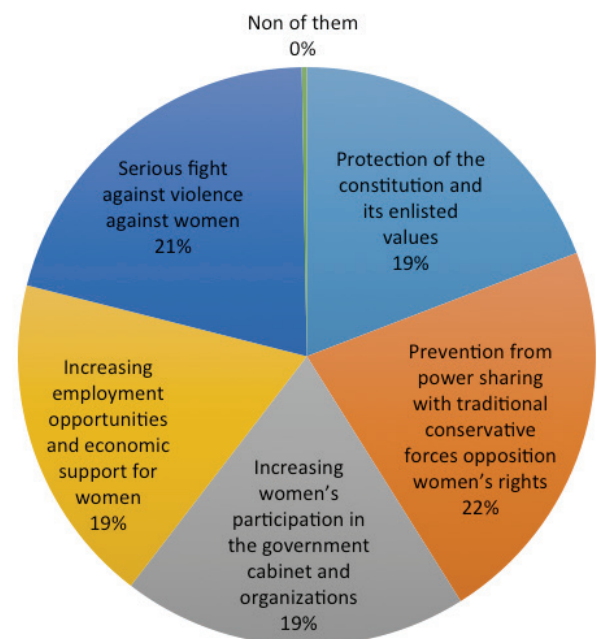
The main demand of women in all seven regions was for government to not share power with Taliban and conservative forces, which was 22 percent of all respondents. 21 percent of the respondents have demanded fighting violence against women, and 20 percent have asked for the protection of the constitution. 19 percent of respondents have asked for inclusion of more women ministers in the president's cabinet, and 18 percent have asked

for more employment opportunities and economic support for women.

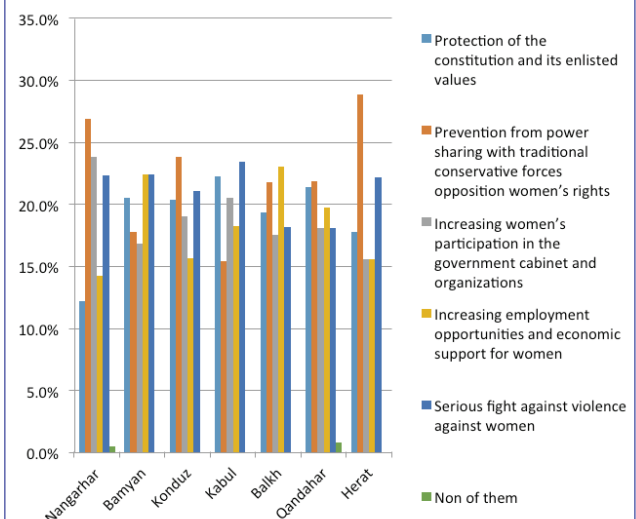
Furthermore, the participants in the survey have expressed concern if the future president has not a supportive view towards women's rights which will result in creation of even more challenges.

Chart 4:
What are your most important demands on women's issues from the next president of Afghanistan?

A) National level



B) According to the regions



Among the presidential nominees, four of them are from former Mujahedin groups, five from technocrats who have returned to their country after spending years in the West, and one from former president, and one from current president's family. Most of these nominees have either served as ministers or governors in the last 12 years.

If the next president is one who will care about the well-being and future of the country, the Taliban period will not be repeated.¹⁴ A number of women's rights advocates believe that Mujahedin and Taliban share the same view towards women. The Mujahedin have served in key government positions in the last 12 years and consider themselves as partner to the international community in building the Afghan society based on respect to human rights and equal rights for women, and have shown less violent attitude to the opposing views. With the declined presence of international community following 2014, a number of Mujahedin leaders and local commanders will try to revive their former militia groups. The militia groups were the main violators of women's rights in the 1990s.

2.3. Presence and participation of women in the election

The participants in the regional conferences have said they will be encouraging the women in their regional areas to participate in the election. However, widespread insecurity, is said, will be the main reason behind low turnout of women voters. During the 2004 election, the women comprised 44 percent of the total voters, while in 2009 election, the figure was declined to 38 percent. The women have gone into margins and show less motivation in electing or getting elected.¹⁵ In some electoral constituencies in the southern parts of the country, no woman has ever taken part in the elections.¹⁶ In the third presidential election, the low rate of voters' registration in the insecure provinces, has caused a decline in the number of women voters.

Soraya Parlika, the head of Women Union of Afghanistan, during the regional conference in Kabul, has called the participation of women in the coming election as very important to change their condition.

"The women should take part in the process and change the situation to their advantage." According to her, currently, the presence of women in major decision making in the country has been minimal which shows exclusion of women from taking part in vital issues in the country. This is due to the problem in the current government."

From eight members of the current election commission, two of them are women, and five members of the complaint commission are women too. The presence of women in the election commission is an indicator of women's participation in the election affairs. The election commission is expanding its public awareness activities about the participation of women in the election through influential people such as Mullahs and women networks. The messages sent through these public awareness campaign do not just target women audience but they are aimed general voters in order to promote gender equality education.

The election commission is committed to maintain the rights of voting for all eligible women voters. The commission also takes into consideration the gender balance in employing election workers, trainers, and women outreach staff during the voters' registration and voting process. For women voters it is not required to put their photos on election cards, due to the cultural sensitivities about the women's photos. But they are encouraged to voluntarily decide on taking photos.¹⁷ Despite all these encouraging efforts, the participation of women in receiving voting cards have been lower. Prediction of lower women's turn out in the 2014 election is causing concern among women's rights organizations.

However, the only woman nominee for the election was not able to fulfill the conditions of election commission's nomination and take part in the

14. Fatima Haidari, second year student at Polytechnic university

15. A participant at Kunduz conference

16. For more information please refer to Afghanistan's Independent Election Commission

17. <http://www.iec.org.af/fa/2012-05-29-07-07-28/gender-mainstreaming-fa>

election. In the meantime, for the first time a woman vice presidential candidate, Habiba Sorabi, is running in the election. This shows a remarkable progress in recognizing the capacity of women among the presidential nominees.

The quota of women for the seats in the 2014 provincial councils has been lowered from $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{5}$ in the election laws. While the 25 percent quota for women membership in the provincial council was not guaranteed, the conservatives in the Senate and House of Representatives have lowered the quota. The 25 percent quota in the Parliament and provincial councils, was one of the biggest achievements of the political system for women's political participation. However a number of women's rights advocates say: "The Afghan women should not be happy about the symbolic quotas, it is the time now the women should show their real potentials to the society, and the people need capable representatives."¹⁸ In addition, if the women formulate their agendas and programs based on the values in the villages taking into account the political system that would defend women's political and economic rights, they will attract votes and there will be less concerns for the years beyond 2014.¹⁹

3. Unintended Consequences of Security Transition on Women

The participants in the regional conferences have said that the security transition²⁰ will have direct impact on women's condition. The process will cause the reduction of international aid, declining economic

and employment opportunities for women, and it is possible that insecurity will spread, causing isolation of women.

In the past 12 years, the international forces have been fighting against terrorism such as the Al-Qaida and Taliban. In addition, a large number of these forces have been working in the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT) in all 34 provinces of Afghanistan, building roads, schools, hospitals, and rule of law. During the past decade, they have built close relations with local government institutions as well as becoming part of their political and economic dynamics.

The local populations, especially the women, are main victims of terrorism. Only in the first half of 2013, 106 women have been killed and 241 others have been wounded, indicating 61 percent increase, compared to the same period in 2012. During the same period, 231 children have been killed and 529 others have been wounded. The United Nations office UNAMA, has registered a 42 percent increase of those civilians killed and wounded, putting the responsibility of the casualties 74 percent to the armed government opposition, 9 percent the government and international forces, and 12 percent have received harms in the conflict. Most of the casualties, 52 percent, has been said to arise from suicide bombing and improvised explosive devices IEDs. According to the same report, 54 percent of the victims of airstrikes were the women and children. In the first half of 2013, 90 women and children have lost their lives in the airstrikes.²¹

In response to the survey conducted by Afghanistan Watch, in October and November of 2013, following were stated by human rights activists. 49 percent said the women will be vulnerable and face violence, showing concern, and 19 percent said the international economic support will cut off following transition period, and 17 percent believed the conservative forces will gain power. 15 percent of the respondents said the law enforcement branches of

18. Mobina KhairAndish, director of Radio Balkh, participant at Mazar-e-Sharif's regional conference

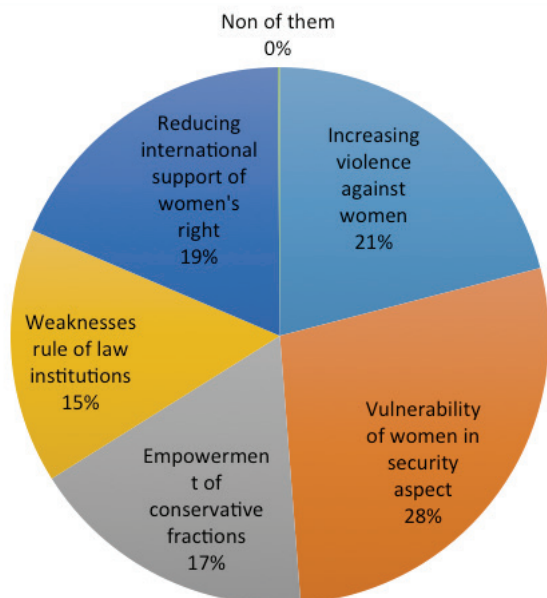
19. Ms. Roshan Sirat, civil society activist, participant at Kabul's regional conference

20. According to the Chicago conference, on 21 May 2012, in the period between 2012-2014, the military operations and maintaining security responsibility will be transferred to Afghan National Army and Police, and the role of international forces will change to a supportive one. It is expected that by the end of 2014, all American and NATO forces under International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF), withdraw from Afghanistan, except the residual forces which will remain in the country in accordance with bilateral security agreement with the US and NATO. These forces will be stationed in the country. The foreign forces numbering an estimated 8,000-9,000 US soldiers in addition to other countries military reaching to a total 20,000, will be training and equipping Afghan National Army and Police, and fighting terrorism.

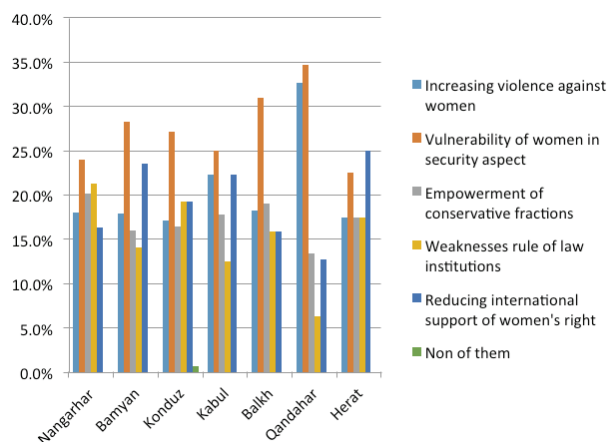
21. Afghanistan mid-year report, protection of civilian in armed conflicts, UNAMA, Kabul

Chart 5:
Which of the following are contributing to your concerns about the transfer of security responsibility?

A) National level



B) According to the regions



the government will be weakened.

With the withdrawal of international forces it is worried that Afghanistan will return to the period of chaos with the Taliban and local warlords coming back to the power, the security forces failing to maintain security in some areas and districts. There is fear that the instability and civil war such as what happened in 1992 would recur. Increasing risks of political instability will cause the withdrawal of investments

from the country, increase unemployment, and creating a sense of uncertainty among the people.

The corrupt government organizations and weak rule of law, is putting huge negative pressure on women. Therefore, 2014 will have vital importance for women in Afghanistan, in order to step up preventative efforts for the worst to not happen. Violence against women is more directed by the Taliban and the Talibanization of society. Corruption, and reluctant police attitude towards women's rights is another source of concern.

There is also a possibility that the local Afghan police will turn into militia groups as the international aid is going to decline. A number of Taliban and armed government opposition who have joined the peace process, have been appointed as local police. Therefore, money can be a motivating factor. There have been several incidents of changing sides.

3.1. Mitigating the consequences of security transition

The security transition is underway with a planned timetable regardless of realities on the ground. The impact of this process will be multi-dimensional, which will include security, reconstruction, rule of law, and economy. Most of these dimensions have not been assessed very well. Despite this, the participants in Mazar-e-Sharif conference have expressed optimism that the withdrawal of forces will become a source of self-confidence among people.

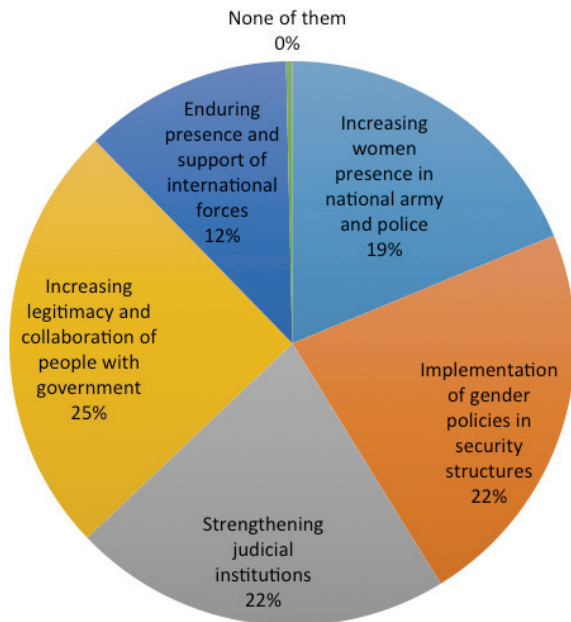
Among the respondents to the survey on mitigating security risks during transition and its consequences, 25 percent emphasized strengthening cooperation among people and the government, 22 percent said the judicial institutions to be strengthened, 22 percent have emphasized on implementation of gender equality policies, 19 percent have asked for increasing participation of women in the national army and police, and 12 percent of the respondents have called for continued presence of international forces.

The women police can serve as practical access points for women to receive legal support. If safe working

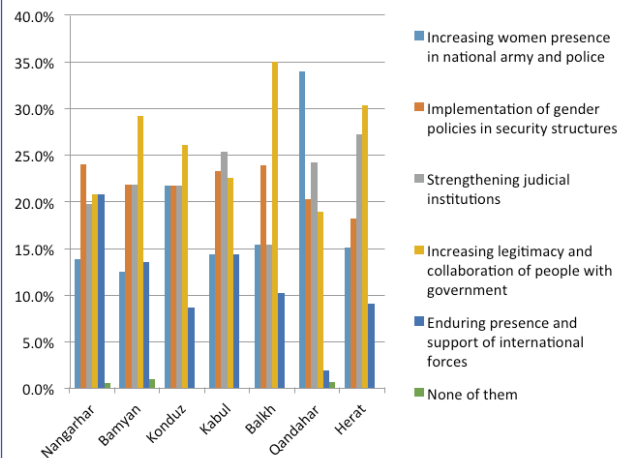
Chart 6:

What are your suggestions about filling security gaps and precluding from possible negative consequences of security transition?

A) National level



B) According to the regions



space is provided for women police, their acceptance will be elevated among the society, especially the local elders and religious scholars. Around 1506 women serve in the national police uniform currently, which is only 1 percent, compared to 157,000 police force in total. This figure is less than half of the 3249 position allocated for women in police. Around 1,700 women serve in the national army.

Meanwhile, high percentage of illiteracy among the women police, 80 percent, is the primary problem in building their capacity. According to the forecasts about the national police force, during the next ten years, it is expected that the women will have to comprise 10 percent of the police force. The NATO member countries such as Britain, Germany, and Holland, and non-NATO member countries such as Australia, are training and building the capacity of the police force.

Ms. Ozra Jafar, the mayor of Nilli, capital of Daikundi province, has expressed the following regarding long-term presence of international forces.

“If the bilateral security agreement is signed, the situation will remain the same but the women will try to increase their presence in the society. In the provinces where there is relative security, the women are already taking part. It depends on people’s optimism, if they are optimistic about the security it will encourage the women to take part in the social arenas. So far many countries have preconditioned their assistance to Afghanistan on women’s participation in various fields. Therefore the Afghan government will accept as it is under pressure. But with dwindling international community’s aid, the Afghan government must be prepared ideologically to include women. In that same vein, the men and women should also accept that women must be present in all arenas of the society.”²²

Ms. Alima, the director of women’s political committee, believes that the main problem lies in the culture of impunity and administrative corruption.

“Even now when the international forces are here, in the areas controlled by the government, women are punished by flogging, and Kangaroo courts are held. The government based on political expedencies has destroyed Afghanistan. I am worried about the culture of impunity. This culture brings most of the harms to the women. The first victims of administrative corruption is also women. For instance, if a woman is raped, the man who has committed the crime is released but the woman is imprisoned since she

22. Interview with Afghanistan Watch

has no money to pay the bribe. She remains in the prison for months and years since her case is not investigated. Or a powerful commander or individual rapes a woman, but he walks freely and is not being pursued by the authorities. That's why I am saying the first victim of administrative corruption is women."²³

4. The Impact of Economic Transition on Women

There is a correlation between gender equality and economic development. In every society that there is gender equality, the economy thrives. If the women political advocates and the organizations run by women do not become self-sufficient and economically independent, the political participation of women will become difficult.

According to the economic transition process, Afghanistan must move towards self-sufficiency. The government revenue must come from internal sources such as the natural resources. This process may take a decade to fruition. For the same reason, the donor countries have promised in the Tokyo Conference of July 2012, to support Afghanistan with 16 billion dollars for four years beyond 2014, under the condition that Afghanistan is committed to fight corruption, improve good governance and a democratic society.

It seems like the women entrepreneurs will receive most of the harms from reduction of international aid. According to a survey conducted from these entrepreneurs, 78 percent of them run small businesses, while 81 percent of them have no access to financial sources. 76 percent of these women entrepreneurs have learned doing business in the past 12 years, most of them through working with international organizations. Half of these entrepreneurs do business with ISAF and international organizations in Afghanistan.²⁴

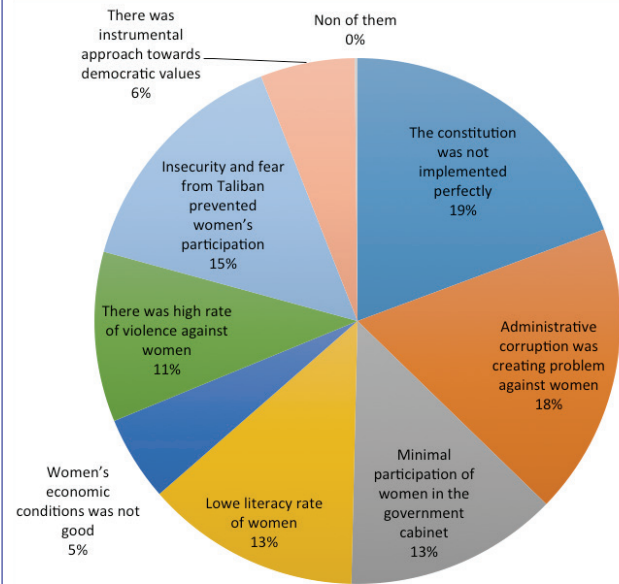
In in general overview, the participants of regional

23. Interview with Afghanistan Watch

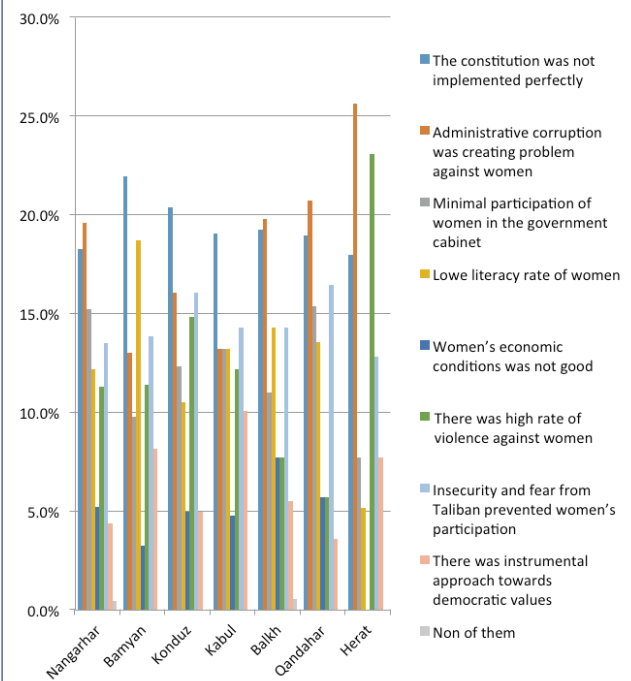
24. For further study of Afghan women's economic participation, please refer to 2013 report by Building Market, at www.buildingmarket.org

Chart 7:
What have been the main shortcomings/problems which hampered women's political participation in the past 12 years?

A) National level



B) According to the regions



conferences in the seven regions of the country, have expressed that the problems will remain for women's political and social participation in the country. 37 percent of the respondents said the problems are lack of rule of law and the endemic administrative corruption, 26 percent of the women said that the Taliban was a major source of fear, while 13 percent of them told the women role may decrease in the policy making positions including having seats in the government cabinet. And 18 percent of the respondents said the low literacy rate and dire economic situation as a problem.

The results from the interview in the seven regions show differences in prioritization of the problems by respondents. For the women in Herat, Kandahar, Mazar-e-Sharif, and Nangarhar, corruption is a major problem for women, while in Bamiyan, Kabul and Kunduz, the economic hardships was given as primary concern.

The Afghan women have found better opportunities in doing unconventional work and business outside their homes, during the past decade. The demand for women workforce is increasing in the market. The women who have become involved in work and business, call their families as their main supporters. These women are emerging as role models for the rest of the women. If special attention is not paid to the negative impacts of economic transition, the women businesses will be harmed.

The women nominees in the parliamentary and provincial councils' elections are relying on financial resources from their families for campaigning. While the women nominees have lower financial resources at their hands compared to the male nominees, they



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have been able to campaign effectively using less costly methods, competing with them.²⁵

4.1. Reducing economic harms for women

The Afghan government should provide education opportunities for women to receive skills in order to prepare as potential workforce in the jobs market. Around one-third of the country's population live below poverty lines. Using the women potentials to take part in the economy will help alleviate poverty and improve the growth Afghanistan's gross domestic products GDP. While women's education has remarkably improved in the last decade, but figures show that only 13 percent of adult women are educated, and about 20 percent around 18 years of age have not had the opportunity to receive education.

While the Afghan Constitution article 48 provides the right to work for all Afghan citizens but due to the traditional nature of the Afghan society, there is still opposition to women outside home by the conservative forces. However there are positive signs emerging that shows social views regarding women working outside home.

Creating balance between the two genders

25. Mahri Razaye, *A Look at Management and Financial Sources of Election Campaigns of Women in the Two Previous Parliamentary Elections*. Published by Afghanistan Watch.

is necessary in the government system.²⁶ The participants in the conferences have asked the future government to not limit support for women to slogans, and they ask the United Nations to continue its support beyond 2014.²⁷

Afghanistan cannot be judged only from what is happening in Kabul. A number of participants in the regional conference in northern Afghanistan, such as Malalai Roshan Dil have maintained that advocacy efforts should be focused on the provinces. According to her, the mobilization of efforts at the provincial level will help structural evolution in various areas and will have lasting impact in the management of social and political situation of the country.

The right to work for women is vital for most the poverty-stricken families in the Afghan society. More than 70 thousand Afghan households are headed by women who live with low level of income. Any type of government or international communities policies that are aimed at women's employment, will directly impact these vulnerable groups.

The rate of unemployment in Afghanistan is estimated to be around 40 percent. Therefore, according to some estimates, the withdrawal of international forces will severely impact or cause the loss of half million employment opportunities. The Afghan government should adopt specific measures to fill this gap.

Most of the women are engaged in small businesses such as handicrafts, which requires critical support of the government.²⁸ While access to financial sources such as land ownership, and having the title of house or properties is a necessity to start off businesses but the women do not possess them. The women run mostly small businesses and they receive support in acquiring loans, marketing, learning technical skills, from international sources.

26. Dr. Naimatullah Hamdard, director of civil society and human rights office in the eastern zone, participant at eastern regional conference.

27. Hashima Sharif, director of Parwin Foundation, and deputy director of women support and development section at the Independent Human Rights Commission

28. . Soraya Sobhrang, handicraft industries entrepreneur, interview with Afghanistan Watch

Findings and Conclusion

The international forces consider the progress in improving the women's rights as part of the fight against terrorism, following 2001, which also reflects realities in Afghanistan. In fact, creating stability and security without human rights, particularly women's rights is meaningless. The 2014 is going to mark the end of political, economic, and security transition. While the government is preparing to take complete control of the country, most of the focus has been shifted on the security transition, other urgent issues such as economic and social needs, particularly those relevant to women, are being neglected.

With the withdrawal of international forces it is worried that Afghanistan will return to the period of chaos with the Taliban and local warlords coming back to capture the power, the security forces failing to maintain security in some areas and districts. It is feared that the instability and civil war such as what happened in 1992 would recur. Increasing risks of political instability will cause the withdrawal of investments from the country, increase unemployment, and create a sense of uncertainty among the people.

The existence of security threats are mostly against women who actively participating in the public life, civil society, and teachers and students. The women's understanding and awareness from the transition process and their role in the process is an important issue which can prevent from possible negative outcomes of the process.

In general, participants have called convening such conferences as vital steps in gathering views and recommendations of women's rights activists for galvanizing a national civil movement to expand a

culture of respect for women's rights in the country. They have expressed hope that the messages sent through these conferences will be received and paid attention to by the government and international community, and be included in the national agendas during the transition period.

The results of surveys indicate concerns of women regarding reconciliation with Taliban in all provinces of the country. The implementation of Taliban's laws, increasing social restrictions, and restricting work, dwindling economic opportunities, and prohibition of education for women, are the primary concerns of women about unintended consequences of reconciliation with Taliban.

Assuring the women's rights during talks and possible settlement with Taliban is a shared concerns of women's rights advocates in Afghanistan. The participants believed that Taliban's view of women has organic relations with the identity of the Taliban, and expecting a radical change in the attitude of Taliban regarding women is far from being realistic.

In order to mitigate the unintended consequences of reconciliation with Taliban, a number of women suggested suspending talks with Taliban. However, most emphasis was placed on including women in the peace talks, and in the structures of the high peace council, while also putting women's rights as a condition for reconciliation. Avoiding to share power with the Taliban and conservative forces opposing women's rights was an important demands of women from the next president of Afghanistan, in all seven conferences.

Afghanistan Watch's survey of women activists in 7

regions of the country suggest that concerns exist about the election and transition of power. 80 percent of respondents have expressed concerns, while 14 percent have expressed optimism about the 2014 election results in protecting women's rights. Only 6 percent of the respondents believed the current situation will continue as it is.

The participants in the regional conferences have agreed that security transition will have direct impact on women's condition. The process will cause the reduction of international aid, declining economic and employment opportunities for women, and it is possible that insecurity will spread, causing further isolation of women.

Recommendations

The declarations¹ released at the end of regional conferences emphasize that instrumentalist approach toward women's rights, has reduced the issue from a human fundamental right to a political one, dependent on the short term political development. Most of the international aid in the last decade has been spent on the security sector with no emphasis on gender issues. It is necessary that the Afghan government and the international community to leave relying on slogans but take practical steps in improving the gender indicators.

As peace talks with Taliban, security transition, presidential and provincial councils' elections, and economic transition, are occurring simultaneously, an ambiguous situation is created as a result. In order to mitigate unforeseen crisis, the concerns and demands of women should be taken into account.

Moreover, the participants have asked the government to prove its commitment to the articles of the constitution and the international conventions that it has signed, and all hurdles that prevent their implementation must be removed. The Taliban should not be granted senior political positions, either before or after the reconciliation, and more importantly the Sharia practice of punishment by the Taliban should be banned forever.

The participants have asked the high peace council to provide more opportunities for women's participation in the Taliban's reintegration program. In addition, women's rights, and the legal support for it, in addition to the respect to the Afghan Constitution and the civil laws, should be enlisted as one of the articles in any settlement agreement reached with

the government opposition.

The Independent Election Commission IEC has been asked to provide special safe polling stations for women voters in the election. Furthermore, the commission must start awareness programs for women's participation in the election and about their power to influence the outcome of the process. Also, the confidence of religious scholars and male members of the society should be built towards supporting women's participation in the election. The members of the civil society and media should be allowed to monitor the transparency of presidential and provincial councils' elections, on 05th April 2014.

The Afghan parliament must identify laws and procedures which direct or indirectly violates women's rights and begin modifying them through legal channels. On the defense of women's rights, the Elimination of Violence against Women (EAVW) law must be passed through the parliament. The laws which provide privileges for women such as having quota for political participation as in the parliament and provincial councils, and laws such as the elimination of violence against women bill, and Action Program for Afghan Women, should be protected against any modifications that would weaken or undermine them.

The civil society organizations, and those defending women's rights, have key role in expressing concerns and providing recommendations for policies, as well as initiating country-wide campaigns for delivering women's demands to the government and the international community. Furthermore, they can put pressure on the government to prevent women's rights violations. The women's rights activists have identified the threats concerning the transition

1. The recommendations are summary of 7 declarations issued in the regional conferences in 7 regions of Afghanistan

period and beyond 2014. Therefore, activities must be focused on mitigating such unintended outcomes as have been identified. With the establishment of national women network, campaigns must start on women's demands from reconciliation with Taliban, and the 2014 election. The civil society organizations should regularly evaluate the progress indicators of women's situation and ask for government's response on the issues. The inclusion and acceleration of women participation in the national army and police forces, which is part of long-term recruitment program, must be continuously monitored.

The movement to advocate women's rights should pay special importance to the religious support from the women's rights. Encouraging the establishment of Islamic studies centers and faculties at the universities is one way to encourage women to specialize in religion, historical basis, and jurisprudence on women's rights in Islam. In order to exchange views, ideas, and strategies, contacts and relations must be established with women organizations in Islamic countries that undergo the similar transition processes.

The international organizations, among them the UN representative office in Afghanistan UNAMA, and other relevant UN organizations should sustain their operations beyond 2014. The UNAMA should initiate a program in accordance to the resolution (1325) of the UN regarding "Women, Peace and Security" in armed conflicts, on the talks with the civil society organizations to assess women's vulnerabilities in Afghanistan's conflict, and elevating their role in the peace process.

Annexes

Annex I: Questionnaire

Women's Mobilization and Participation in Afghanistan's Political Transition Program

Please answer to the questions below by choosing from the multiple choices, expressing concerns and problems against improvement of women's rights. You can choose several answers to each of the question by marking them. The information collected through this questionnaire will only be used for analysis of the views of women's rights advocates, and assessing the differences on the provincial level. Your name will not appear on the questionnaire for anonymity purposes.

1. What are your major concerns regarding unintended consequences of reconciliation with Taliban and its impact on the conditions of women?

- ☐ Employment restrictions
- ☐ Change of the constitution
- ☐ Reduction in economic opportunities for women
- ☐ Implementation of Taliban laws
- ☐ Removal of women from political participation
- ☐ Raise in violence against women
- ☐ Social restrictions of women
- ☐ Preventing from women's education
- ☐ None of the above

2. What are your suggestions to prevent from unintended consequences of reconciliation with Taliban?

- ☐ Including more women in the reconciliation process
- ☐ Transparency in reconciliation process
- ☐ Emphasis on legal status of women in the constitution
- ☐ Suspending the peace talks
- ☐ Reconciliation with Taliban on the condition they respect
- ☐ None of the above

Women's rights as defined in the laws of the country

3. Which of the followings are contributing to your concerns about the transfer of security responsibility?

- ☐ Conservative forces taking power
- ☐ Increase of violence against women
- ☐ Weakening of the law enforcement agencies
- ☐ Women's security vulnerabilities
- ☐ Declining international guarantees and support for women's right
- ☐ Declining international pressure on the government
- ☐ None of the above

4. What are your suggestions about filling security gaps

and precluding from possible negative consequences of security transition?

- ☐ Increasing trust cooperation of people toward government
- ☐ Increasing presence of women in the
- ☐ Continued and supportive presence of foreign forces National Army and police force
- ☐ Implementing gender equality police in security forces
- ☐ Strengthening the justice institutions
- ☐ None of the above

5. What will be the impacts of the upcoming presidential election and changes in the government's leadership on the conditions of women?

- ☐ Reduced employment and economic opportunities
- ☐ Conservative forces taking over power
- ☐ Weakening social position of women
- ☐ Suspension of efforts to improve women's conditions.
- ☐ Positive impacts and institutionalization of gender
- ☐ The loss of all achievements of women's rights in the last decade
- ☐ Declining political participation of women
- ☐ Continuation of current situation
- ☐ None of the above

6. What have been the main shortcomings/problems which hampered women's political participation in the past 12 years?

- ☐ The women were mostly illiterate and had no skills
- ☐ The Constitution was not enforced properly
- ☐ The women economic situation was in a bad
- ☐ Administrative corruption was problematic for women
- ☐ Too much violence against women
- ☐ The women were underrepresented in key government positions including the cabinet
- ☐ Insecurity and fear from Taliban prevented from political participation
- ☐ Instrumental use of human rights, women's rights, democracy, and freedom.

7. What are your most important demands on women's issues from the next president of Afghanistan?

- ☐ Protection from the current constitution and its values.
- ☐ Preventing from power sharing with traditional conservative forces who oppose women's rights.
- ☐ Increasing women's seats in the ministerial cabinet
- ☐ Enhance and improve economic opportunities for women
- ☐ fight violence against women
- ☐ None of the above

Annex II: Exclusive Interviews

1. Habiba Sorabi, vice presidential candidate, former governor of Bamiyan
2. Fauzia Koofi, head of women's commission in the lower house of parliament, from Badkshsh province
3. Ozra Jafari, mayor of Nilli, the capital of Daikundi province
4. Zahra Sepehr, director of Women and Children Support Organization of Afghanistan, Kabul
5. Dr. Alima, Head of Political Participation Committee of Women
6. Soraya Faizi, entrepreneur, Kabul
7. Fatima Ahmadi, entrepreneur, Kabul
8. Fatima Haidari, second year student, Kabul Polytechnic University
9. Zarghona Azizi, teacher at Mohragan school, Kabul
10. Sharifa Azimi, head of women affairs department, Faryab province
11. Maryam Karimi, head of Future for Children organization in Mazar-e-Sharif
12. Nasrin Nabizada, a participant in Mazar-e-Sharif conference

Annex III: Tables explaining the number and percentage of respondents for AW's survey questionnaires

1. Women's concerns regarding reconciliation with Taliban

	Nangarhar	Bamiyan	Kunduz	Kabul	Balkh	Kandahar	Herat
Changing the constitution	31	16	18	33	21	11	6
Implementing Taliban laws	29	19	25	37	27	34	7
Increasing violence against women	49	34	32	42	32	38	12
Increasing social restriction	22	23	30	38	22	24	9
Restriction for girls' education	41	25	29	42	25	18	9
Employment restrictions	36	16	29	34	21	23	6
Declining employment opportunities for women	27	26	25	33	19	15	8
Removing women from political participation	0	23	25	43	23	13	1
None of the above	2	0	1	0	1	0	0
Total number of respondents	237	182	214	302	191	176	58

Concerns regarding reconciliation with Taliban (percentage)

	Nangarhar	Bamiyan	Kunduz	Kabul	Balkh	Kandahar	Herat
Changing the constitution	13.1%	8.8%	8.4%	10.9%	11.0%	6.3%	10.3%
Implementing Taliban laws	12.2%	10.4%	11.7%	12.3%	14.1%	19.3%	12.1%
Increasing violence against women	20.7%	18.7%	15.0%	13.9%	16.8%	21.6%	20.7%
Increasing social restriction	9.3%	12.6%	14.0%	12.6%	11.5%	13.6%	15.5%
Restriction for girls' education	17.3%	13.7%	13.6%	13.9%	13.1%	10.2%	15.5%
Employment restrictions	15.2%	8.8%	13.6%	11.3%	11.0%	13.1%	10.3%
Declining employment opportunities for women	11.4%	14.3%	11.7%	10.9%	9.9%	8.5%	13.8%
Removing women from political participation	0.0%	12.6%	11.7%	14.2%	12.0%	7.4%	1.7%
None of the above	0.8%	0.0%	0.5%	0.0%	0.5%	0.0%	0.0%
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

2. Suggestions regarding preventing unintended consequences of Talks with Taliban

	Nangarhar	Bamiyan	Kunduz	Kabul	Balkh	Kandahar	Herat
Transparency in the peace talks	18	28	30	33	31	15	8
Suspending peace talks	16	3	8	13	21	40	2
Reconciliation on the condition that women's rights are respected	54	29	32	34	31	19	0
Including more women in the peace process	42	18	26	32	29	11	11
None of the above	1	0	1	0	0	0	6
Total number of respondents	131	78	97	112	112	85	27

Suggestions regarding preventing unintended consequences of Talks with Taliban (percentage)

	Nangarhar	Bamiyan	Kunduz	Kabul	Balkh	Kandahar	Herat
Transparency in the peace talks	13.7%	35.9%	30.9%	29.5%	27.7%	17.6%	29.6%
Suspending peace talks	12.2%	3.8%	8.2%	11.6%	18.8%	47.1%	7.4%
Reconciliation on the condition that women's rights are respected	41.2%	37.2%	33.0%	30.4%	27.7%	22.4%	0.0%
Including more women in the peace process	32.1%	23.1%	26.8%	28.6%	25.9%	12.9%	40.7%
None of the above	0.8%	0.0%	1.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	22.2%
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

3. Concerns regarding security transition

	Nangarhar	Bamiyan	Kunduz	Kabul	Balkh	Kandahar	Herat
Increase of violence against women	33	19	24	34	23	46	7
Women vulnerabilities due to security situation	44	30	38	38	39	49	9
Conservative forces taking over power	37	17	23	27	24	19	7
Weakening of law enforcement agencies	39	15	27	19	20	9	7
Declining international support for women's rights	30	25	27	34	20	18	10
None of the above	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
	183	106	140	152	126	141	40

Concerns regarding security transition (percentage)

	Nangarhar	Bamiyan	Kunduz	Kabul	Balkh	Kandahar	Herat
Increase of violence against women	18.0%	17.9%	17.1%	22.4%	18.3%	32.6%	17.5%
Women vulnerabilities due to security situation	24.0%	28.3%	27.1%	25.0%	31.0%	34.8%	22.5%
Conservative forces taking over power	20.2%	16.0%	16.4%	17.8%	19.0%	13.5%	17.5%
Weakening of law enforcement agencies	21.3%	14.2%	19.3%	12.5%	15.9%	6.4%	17.5%
Declining international support for women's rights	16.4%	23.6%	19.3%	22.4%	15.9%	12.8%	25.0%
None of the above	0.0%	0.0%	0.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

4. Recommendations for mitigating unintended consequences of security transition

	Nangarhar	Bamiyan	Kunduz	Kabul	Balkh	Kandahar	Herat
Increasing women recruitment in the National Army and Police Force	26	12	25	21	18	52	5
Implementing gender equality policies in the security institutions	45	21	25	34	28	31	6
Strengthening legal and justice institutions	37	21	25	37	18	37	9
Increase public confidence and enhance their cooperation with government	39	28	30	33	41	29	10
The continued support and presence of security forces	39	13	10	21	12	3	3
None of the above	1	1	0	0	0	1	0
Total number of respondents	187	96	115	146	117	153	33

Recommendations for mitigating unintended consequences of security transition (percentage)

	Nangarhar	Bamiyan	Kunduz	Kabul	Balkh	Kandahar	Herat
Increasing women recruitment in the National Army and Police Force	13.9%	12.5%	21.7%	14.4%	15.4%	34.0%	15.2%
Implementing gender equality policies in the security institutions	24.1%	21.9%	21.7%	23.3%	23.9%	20.3%	18.2%
Strengthening legal and justice institutions	19.8%	21.9%	21.7%	25.3%	15.4%	24.2%	27.3%
Increase public confidence and enhance their cooperation with government	20.9%	29.2%	26.1%	22.6%	35.0%	19.0%	30.3%
The continued support and presence of security forces	20.9%	13.5%	8.7%	14.4%	10.3%	2.0%	9.1%
None of the above	0.5%	1.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.7%	0.0%
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

5. The Impact of election and change in the government leadership on situation of women

	Nangarhar	Bamiyan	Kunduz	Kabul	Balkh	Kandahar	Herat
Conservative forces taking over power	14	14	25	14	14	6	3
Suspension of official efforts to improve the situation of women	38	13	23	23	17	36	5
The loss of progress made in the past decade	32	9	16	20	9	20	3
Declining women's political participation	37	13	39	22	17	30	2
Declining employment/economic opportunities	26	13	12	11	12	16	1
Weakening social positions of women	26	8	14	11	14	17	2
Positive outcomes and institutionalization of gender equality	17	20	21	31	20	11	6
The continuation of current situation	9	6	11	10	12	1	2
None of the above	0	1	1	1	0	0	0
The total number of respondents	199	97	162	143	115	137	24

The Impact of election and change in the government leadership on situation of women (percentage)

	Nangarhar	Bamiyan	Kunduz	Kabul	Balkh	Kandahar	Herat
Conservative forces taking over power	7.0%	14.4%	15.4%	9.8%	12.2%	4.4%	12.5%
Suspension of official efforts to improve the situation of women	19.1%	13.4%	14.2%	16.1%	14.8%	26.3%	20.8%
The loss of progress made in the past decade	16.1%	9.3%	9.9%	14.0%	7.8%	14.6%	12.5%
Declining women's political participation	18.6%	13.4%	24.1%	15.4%	14.8%	21.9%	8.3%
Declining employment/economic opportunities	13.1%	13.4%	7.4%	7.7%	10.4%	11.7%	4.2%
Weakening social positions of women	13.1%	8.2%	8.6%	7.7%	12.2%	12.4%	8.3%
Positive outcomes and institutionalization of gender equality	8.5%	20.6%	13.0%	21.7%	17.4%	8.0%	25.0%
The continuation of current situation	4.5%	6.2%	6.8%	7.0%	10.4%	0.7%	8.3%
None of the above	0.0%	1.0%	0.6%	0.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

6. Major problems against women's participation in the past 12 years

	Nangarhar	Bamiyan	Kunduz	Kabul	Balkh	Kandahar	Herat
The constitution was not implemented perfectly	42	27	33	36	35	53	7
Administrative corruption was creating problem against women	45	16	26	25	36	58	10
Minimal participation of women in the government cabinet	35	12	20	25	20	43	3
Low literacy rate of women	28	23	17	25	26	38	2
Women's economic conditions was not good	12	4	8	9	14	16	0
There was high rate of violence against women	26	14	24	23	14	16	9
Insecurity and fear from Taliban prevented women's participation	31	17	26	27	26	46	5
There was instrumental approach towards democratic values	10	10	8	19	10	10	3
None of the above	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
Total number of respondents	230	123	162	189	182	280	39

Major problems against women's participation in the past 12 years (percent)

	Nangarhar	Bamiyan	Kunduz	Kabul	Balkh	Kandahar	Herat
The constitution was not implemented perfectly	18.3%	22.0%	20.4%	19.0%	19.2%	18.9%	17.9%
Administrative corruption was creating problem against women	19.6%	13.0%	16.0%	13.2%	19.8%	20.7%	25.6%
Minimal participation of women in the government cabinet	15.2%	9.8%	12.3%	13.2%	11.0%	15.4%	7.7%
Low literacy rate of women	12.2%	18.7%	10.5%	13.2%	14.3%	13.6%	5.1%
Women's economic conditions was not good	5.2%	3.3%	4.9%	4.8%	7.7%	5.7%	0.0%
There was high rate of violence against women	11.3%	11.4%	14.8%	12.2%	7.7%	5.7%	23.1%
Insecurity and fear from Taliban prevented women's participation	13.5%	13.8%	16.0%	14.3%	14.3%	16.4%	12.8%
There was instrumental approach towards democratic values	4.3%	8.1%	4.9%	10.1%	5.5%	3.6%	7.7%
None of the above	0.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.5%	0.0%	0.0%
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

7. Important demands of women from the future president

	Nangarhar	Bamiyan	Kunduz	Kabul	Balkh	Kandahar	Herat
Protection of the constitution and its enlisted values	24	22	30	39	32	51	8
Prevention from power sharing with traditional conservative forces opposition women's rights	53	19	35	27	36	52	13
Increasing women's participation in the government cabinet and organizations	47	18	28	36	29	43	7
Increasing employment opportunities and economic support for women	28	24	23	32	38	47	7
Serious fight against violence against women	44	24	31	41	30	43	10
None of the above	1	0	0	0	0	2	0
Total number of respondents	197	107	147	175	165	238	45

Important demands of women from the future president (percentage)

	Nangarhar	Bamiyan	Kunduz	Kabul	Balkh	Kandahar	Herat
Protection of the constitution and its enlisted values	12.2%	20.6%	20.4%	22.3%	19.4%	21.4%	17.8%
Prevention from power sharing with traditional conservative forces opposition women's rights	26.9%	17.8%	23.8%	15.4%	21.8%	21.8%	28.9%
Increasing women's participation in the government cabinet and organizations	23.9%	16.8%	19.0%	20.6%	17.6%	18.1%	15.6%
Increasing employment opportunities and economic support for women	14.2%	22.4%	15.6%	18.3%	23.0%	19.7%	15.6%
Serious fight against violence against women	22.3%	22.4%	21.1%	23.4%	18.2%	18.1%	22.2%
None of the above	0.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.8%	0.0%
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Annex IV: Afghanistan's Ulema (scholars) Council's Decree on Women's Rights

Unlike other civilizations and societies of the present and the past, the sacred religion of Islam – in recognition of the fundamental role of women in nurturing the society – offers women many civil and social rights, and human dignity and honor.

In the centuries before Islam, and among human civilizations and nations, women were deprived of any kind of human and social rights. They were treated as cheap property and were even buried alive. But by the advent of the globe-illuminating sun [that was] the sacred religion of Islam, many rights were given to women according to nature, such as:

- A. The right to property, ownership and commerce
- B. The right to inheritance according to the principles of the sacred Shariah of Islam
- C. The right to mehr (very roughly, dower), which is exclusively the woman's [property] and no one has the right to take it without her consent. All other practices known as toyana, shareeb, etc. do not have a basis in the Shariah.
- D. The right to choose a spouse according to her own will. Forcibly marrying an adult woman is not allowed, although consultation with the guardians – which is a religious rule – is practiced
- E. Women, like men, have dignity and are beings with freedom; therefore, exchanging a woman for someone's blood (badal), or for [establishing] peace, or exchanging a woman for another's dower are haram and prohibited under the Shariah.
- F. Women cannot be inherited. Similarly, there are many other rights, granted to a woman under the religion of Islam, which are observed. But, where a Muslim woman has many rights, [she also] has duties and obligations, such as:
 - A) Adherence, in faith and action, to the orders and prohibitions of Islam's sacred Shariah
 - B) Complete adherence and observance of the hijab [according to the Shariah], which protects the dignity and personality of the woman
 - C) Avoiding mingling with stranger men in various social situations, such as education, shopping, the office and other affairs of life
 - D) In consideration of the clarity of verses 1 and 34 of Surah an-Nisa' [of the Qur'an], men are fundamental and women are secondary; also, lineage is derived from the man. Therefore, the use of words and expressions that contradict the sacred verses must be strictly avoided.
 - E) Respecting [the orders] about the multiplicity of wives (polygamy), which are in accordance with clear orders of the Qur'an
 - F) Avoiding travel without a [Shariah-sanctioned] mahram (male companion)
 - G) Adherence to the clear orders of Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) Shariah in case of divorce

It needs to be said that teasing, harassment and beating of women without a Shariah-compliant reason, as set forth clearly in the Glorious Qur'an, is prohibited. Afghanistan's Ulema Council requests the judicial and law-enforcement organs of the country to punish, in accordance with Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) Shariah and national laws, the perpetrators of any kind of assault from persons against women.

A multitude of rights and responsibilities are set forth in the religious texts of Islam; they will be consulted as needed.

Annex V: Mullah Omar's Decree on Treatment of Women Patients in Hospitals

Issue number: 1844

1. Female patient should refer to the female doctors, supposedly if there was need to refer to male doctors, the women must be accompanied by Mahram (male companion).
2. Female patients and male doctors are both obliged to wear Hijab (bodily covering) during the medical checkup.
3. The male doctors must no look or touch other areas of woman patients body, other than the part needing medical diagnosis.
4. The hospital reception area for women must be covered.
5. In hospitals, the person issuing appointment for women must be a woman, and should allow the women patients at a specific time.
6. In the hospital rooms where women patients are undergoing treatment, the hospital staff for the night shift must only refer to the patients when they are asked by the patients, otherwise they are not allowed to enter their rooms.
7. Interlocution among male doctors and female nurses and vice versa is not allowed other than when there is a need, in which case they must exercise wearing Hijab (bodily covering).
8. The women doctors are obliged to wear old clothing when visiting hospitals. They should not wear fashionable dresses or any other type fashion.
9. Female employees and nurses are not allowed to visit rooms where men are under treatment.
10. The staff at the hospitals are obliged to attend congregational prayers at the allocated time. The directors of the hospital must appoint the prayer leader and specify the mosque or praying venue.
11. The religious police, of the prevention of vice and promotion of virtue, whenever investigating in the hospitals, must not be blocked or prevented from entering.

In case of violation of the abovementioned articles, the violators will be punished in accordance with Sharia.

Signed by
Mullah Omar Mujaheed

Annex VI: Declarations of Regional Conferences on Mobilization and Participation of Women in the Political Transition in Afghanistan

Declaration of Bamyan Regional Conference on Mobilization and Participation of Women in the Political Transition in Afghanistan

Central Highland region (Bamyan, Daikondi, Qazni and Ghur)

During the past 12 years (since 2001) positive developments brought about as a result of the Bonn agreement and the establishment of a democratic system of government in Afghanistan has improved women's political, social and economic conditions as well as their rights. The provision of equal rights for women and men through the enactment of the new constitution in the Loya Jirga of 2004, are the basis of the political presence of women in the politics and society the outcome of which is the participation of women in the government institutions and other organizations. In addition to Afghanistan joining other international conventions such as the convention preventing discrimination against women, it should establish additional requirements for respect and support of women's rights in all areas in the country.

The steps taken to improve the condition for women directly or indirectly, has changed the debate over the women's rights to a pivotal issue in the prospects of state-building and democratization of the political structure in Afghanistan. In addition to establishing a human rights commission, the establishment of ministry of women affairs was reflective of pivotal importance of women's rights and the place of women in the power structure and shared understanding created for the support and defending women's rights in a consistent manner. Following these efforts and in light of the enforced internal laws and the international obligations especially the Afghanistan Compact agreed in London, and National Development Strategy of Afghanistan, the Afghan government has introduced a long term strategy in the framework of "Practical Program for Afghan Women 2007-2017", in 2007. The primary aim of this strategy was to establish a framework for the implementation of policies and commitments of the government for

improving the condition of women. In addition to these efforts by government, the issues of women's rights have gained importance in the activities of civil society organizations with several organizations being established in the past decade defending the rights of women. These organizations and the women's rights activists have been able to begin campaigns and efforts proportionate to their capacity promoting and improving the rights of women. In total, the legal and practical measures have created prospects for strengthening the presence of women in all areas of social life and have created an extraordinary potential for reinstating the position of women in the social and political spheres and defense of their rights.

Notwithstanding all the efforts that have taken place so far, the achievements in the areas of women's rights seem insufficient and it is susceptible to reverse. Still majority of women in the country suffer from illiteracy and women in the society and in their families fall victims of widespread violence. Furthermore, the issue of women's rights has not been institutionalized in the political structure and culture of the Afghan people. The main factor behind the failure of the government and the civil society and efforts for institutionalizing women's rights and promoting the respect for political, social and economic rights of women is the tradition and culture of the society and the difficulties to promote a culture of respect in the political and social relationship and political approach towards women's rights.

The political approach towards women's rights can create challenge against a sustained civil movement. The political approach declines the rights of women from inherent and inalienable human rights to a political ploy being influenced by social development.

In addition to the numerous number of organizations, women's rights activists and women's rights networks and its multiplication, a remarkable capacity have been build in the recent years to defend from the rights of women in the national level. However, the organizational coordination and sporadic nature of activities taking place has reduced the impact of these organizations. As a result activities aimed at promoting women's rights activities have not been able to create a strong and powerful national voice for the defense and support of women's rights.

Therefore, the issue of women's rights remains un-institutionalized and reversible, an issue that contributes to the concerns about the prospects of women's rights in regards with the political transition in 2014, and protecting the progress made in the past decade.

The 2014 and the development related to it such as the reduction of foreign forces and the changes in the structure of power will place Afghanistan in a critical condition, undergoing an important political transition since the fall of the Taliban. The political transition will include four important vital issues:

- 1- Reduction/withdrawal of foreign forces and transfer of complete security responsibility, and the reduction of political support from the international community
- 2- The upcoming presidential election and its potential impact on the political and social spheres.
- 3- The issue of talks with the Taliban and armed opposition of the government which is being overshadowed by political and social agendas completely different from accepted national principles.
- 4- The reduction of international community's financial support and the self-sufficiency of the Afghan government

These four issues are the vital indicators of political transition and determinant of stability and security, especially for the rights of women to participate in the

political, social and economic spheres in the country.

The women and organizations defending their rights while understanding the challenges against improvement of women's conditions in Afghanistan, and paying respect to the religious values and acceptable national traditions, with a commitment to the promotion and protection of the democratic values and with the belief in establishing an Afghan national process, as the basis for the efforts for institutionalizing respect for the women's rights in the legal framework, following a one-day conference and discussions on the impediments, problems and concerns regarding the support and defense of Afghan women's rights, would like to turn the attention of the Afghan government and international community to the following concerns and recommendations for the support of women's rights, and the institutionalization of respect for the human dignity of women.

Organizations and institutions participating in the conference "Mobilization for the Participation of Women in the Political Transition of Afghanistan" express following concerns regarding the reduction of international aid and economic condition of women post-2014, as follows:

- 1- We call upon the international community especially the United Nations and its organizations working in the areas of women's rights to continue their work in this critical period in the country in order to improve the political, social, and economic conditions of women.
- 2- We would like to ask the government as the executor of justice and signatory to the international conventions to support the women presence in all areas in the country
- 3- We call upon the members of the High Peace Council and those involved in the peace process that in the process to negotiate with the Taliban the women's rights be protected and we would like to ask for more participation of women in the peace council.
- 4- As the Parliament, especially the House of

Representatives has a huge responsibility regarding the fate of the country's citizens by making laws; we call upon the parliament to pass the law on Elimination of Violence against Women (EVAW).

5- We call upon all the stakeholders involved in the 2014 election, especially the Independent Election Commission to lay the ground and encourage for active participation of women in the election.

6- We would like to ask the civil society organizations and those women's rights advocates to step up measures in raising awareness and mobilizing the public for the defense of women's rights and fulfill their duty.

7- We call upon all the women in the country and women rights advocacy organizations to widely participate in the upcoming election and help the country transition towards peace and stability.

August 24, 2013

Declaration of Herat Regional Conference on Mobilization and Participation of Women in the Political Transition in Afghanistan

West Region (Herat, Ghour, Badghis, Farah, and Nimroz)

During the past 12 years (since 2001) positive developments brought about as a result of the Bonn agreement and the establishment of a democratic system of government in Afghanistan has improved women's political, social and economic conditions as well as their rights. The provision of equal rights for women and men through the enactment of the new constitution in the Loya Jirga of 2004, are the basis of the political presence of women in the politics and society the outcome of which is the participation of women in the government institutions and other organizations. In addition to Afghanistan joining other international conventions such as the convention preventing discrimination against women, it should establish additional requirements for respect and support of women's rights in all areas in the country.

The steps taken to improve the condition for women directly or indirectly, has changed the debate over the women's rights to a pivotal issue in the prospects of state-building and democratization of the political structure in Afghanistan. In addition to establishing a human rights commission, the establishment of ministry of women affairs was reflective of pivotal importance of women's rights and the place of women in the power structure and shared understanding created for the support and defending women's rights in a consistent manner. Following these efforts and in light of the enforced internal laws and the international obligations especially the Afghanistan Compact agreed in London, and National Development Strategy of Afghanistan, the Afghan government has introduced a long term strategy in the framework of "Practical Program for Afghan Women 2007-2017", in 2007. The primary aim of this strategy was to establish a framework for the implementation of policies and commitments of the government for

improving the condition of women. In addition to these efforts by government, the issues of women's rights have gained importance in the activities of civil society organizations with several organizations being established in the past decade defending the rights of women. These organizations and the women's rights activists have been able to begin campaigns and efforts proportionate to their capacity promoting and improving the rights of women. In total, the legal and practical measures have created prospects for strengthening the presence of women in all areas of social life and have created an extraordinary potential for reinstating the position of women in the social and political spheres and defense of their rights.

Notwithstanding all the efforts that have taken place so far, the achievements in the areas of women's rights seem insufficient and it is susceptible to reverse. Still majority of women in the country suffer from illiteracy and women in the society and in their families fall victims of widespread violence. Furthermore, the issue of women's rights has not been institutionalized in the political structure and culture of the Afghan people. The main factor behind the failure of the government and the civil society and efforts for institutionalizing women's rights and promoting the respect for political, social and economic rights of women is the tradition and culture of the society and the difficulties to promote a culture of respect in the political and social relationship and political approach towards women's rights.

The political approach towards women's rights can create challenge against a sustained civil movement. The political approach declines the rights of women from inherent and inalienable human rights to a political ploy being influenced by social development.

In addition to the numerous number of organizations, women's rights activists and women's rights networks and its multiplication, a remarkable capacity have been build in the recent years to defend from the rights of women in the national level. However, the organizational coordination and sporadic nature of activities taking place has reduced the impact of these organizations. As a result activities aimed at promoting women's rights activities have not been able to create a strong and powerful national voice for the defense and support of women's rights.

Therefore, the issue of women's rights remains un-institutionalized and reversible, an issue that contributes to the concerns about the prospects of women's rights in regards with the political transition in 2014, and protecting the progress made in the past decade.

The 2014 and the development related to it such as the reduction of foreign forces and the changes in the structure of power will place Afghanistan in a critical condition, undergoing an important political transition since the fall of the Taliban. The political transition will include four important vital issues:

- 1- Reduction/withdrawal of foreign forces and transfer of complete security responsibility, and the reduction of political support from the international community
- 2- The upcoming presidential election and its potential impact on the political and social spheres.
- 3- The issue of talks with the Taliban and armed opposition of the government which is being overshadowed by political and social agendas completely different from accepted national principles.
- 4- The reduction of international community's financial support and the self-sufficiency of the Afghan government

These four issues are the vital indicators of political transition and determinant of stability and security, especially for the rights of women to participate in the

political, social and economic spheres in the country.

The women and organizations defending their rights while understanding the challenges against improvement of women's conditions in Afghanistan, and paying respect to the religious values and acceptable national traditions, with a commitment to the promotion and protection of the democratic values and with the belief in establishing an Afghan national process, as the basis for the efforts for institutionalizing respect for the women's rights in the legal framework, following a one-day conference and discussions on the impediments, problems and concerns regarding the support and defense of Afghan women's rights, would like to turn the attention of the Afghan government and international community to the following concerns and recommendations for the support of women's rights, and the institutionalization of respect for the human dignity of women.

Organizations and institutions participating in the conference "Mobilization for the Participation of Women in the Political Transition of Afghanistan" express following concerns regarding the reduction of international aid and economic condition of women post-2014, as follows:

- Reduction of economic and project aid in regards with promotion of women's economic condition
- Reduction of aid for the improvement of women's economic capacity building
- Absence of women's participation in the economic areas
- Fear from disappearance of self-built women's network in the national level
- Lessening opportunities for women
- Employment opportunities for women
- Increase in number of violence against women
- Social restrictions against women
- Negative impact over women's education

- Intensified poverty in the derelict families

We also believe that the security transition in the absence of proper management of political situation in the country will have the following consequences in regards with the rights of women:

- Whenever a zero-option is pursued as with the withdrawal of foreign forces a civil war may erupt because of lack of capability of the Afghan security forces
- The withdrawal of foreign forces will impact and reduce the participation of women in the security sector
- With the withdrawal of foreign forces the government armed opposition may gain power through election

As the upcoming presidential election will be a turning point in the political history of the country, it has brought fresh concerns about the condition of women in the country. Organization and women's rights activists are concerned about the following in regards with the election:

- Insecurity and lack of trust in the election process
- Lack of transparency in the election
- The presence of ethnic discrimination
- Lack of women's participation in the election commission

Also, we express concern regarding negotiation with the Taliban. These concerns include the following:

- Possible modification of the constitution to the disadvantage of democracy
- Increase in the cultivation of narcotics
- Concerns over cooperation of international community and the reduction of economic, military, and cultural aid
- Increase in violence against women

- Loss of progress made in the past 12 years

- Decrease in the participation of women in political and social arenas

- Restriction over the education especially for women

With the abovementioned concerns in mind, we the women activist in the south-western region (Herat, Ghour, Badghis, Farah, and Nimroz) provinces, provide following recommendations to the Afghan people, government and the international community.

We believe that in the process to negotiate with the Taliban and armed government opposition following points need to be considered:

- The acceptance of current constitution by the armed government opposition
- Respect for the human and citizens' rights, especially the rights of women
- Respect for the participation of women in all political, economic, social and cultural affairs of the country
- The negotiation process should be transparent and just
- Active participation of women in negotiation and peace process

We have the following recommendations regarding the upcoming presidential election.

- The election must be held on the set schedule
- Adequate and widespread awareness about the election
- Evaluation and assessment of the performance of election commission members
- Evaluation and monitoring of documents provided by the nominees in the election
- Active participation of people, especially women in the voting process

Recommendations regarding improvement of election process:

- The presence of international community in the election
- Provision of security in the volatile areas
- Human rights violators to barred from taking part in the election
- Support for the freedom of expression about the nominees
- The women's participation in the election commission

Concerns following the security transition

- According to the Lisbon agreement, withdrawal of foreign forces is irreversible
- Therefore, the security agreement between Afghanistan and the United States of America should be signed
- As Afghanistan is caught in an intelligence agencies war, the capacity building of security forces should be set a priority
- The presence of warlords, land mafia, narcotics mafia, nepotism, administrative corruption, human rights violators, have created serious political and security challenges against the people and country
- Enhancing the capacity of security forces in shouldering their responsibility
- Job security for women
- Protection of progress made in the areas of women's rights in the past 12 years
- Encouraging women's participation in the policy making processes

Recommendations regarding improvement of economic conditions following 2014 as the international aid to Afghanistan is reduced

- Development of economic infrastructure with the help of the government and economic sectors
- Coordination among the women economic networks and establishing sectors pertaining to women
- Prioritizing research on issues of women

Recommendations

- Coordination should be established between government, economic sectors, and women economic organizations
- People participating in the election should make an informed decision in electing individuals who will shape their future
- Election of individuals who lack knowledge of economic affairs should be refrained
- Preference should be given to the conducts than relations
- Nepotism and cronyism should not interfere in the economic processes

21 August 2013

Declaration of Jalal Abad Regional Conference on Mobilization and Participation of Women in the Political Transition in Afghanistan

Eastern Zone(Nangarhar, Kuner, Laghman, and Nooristan)

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improving the condition of women. In addition to these efforts by government, the issues of women's rights have gained importance in the activities of civil society organizations with several organizations being established in the past decade defending the rights of women. These organizations and the women's rights activists have been able to begin campaigns and efforts proportionate to their capacity promoting and improving the rights of women. In total, the legal and practical measures have created prospects for strengthening the presence of women in all areas of social life and have created an extraordinary potential for reinstating the position of women in the social and political spheres and defense of their rights.

Notwithstanding all the efforts that have taken place so far, the achievements in the areas of women's rights seem insufficient and it is susceptible to reverse. Still majority of women in the country suffer from illiteracy and women in the society and in their families fall victims of widespread violence. Furthermore, the issue of women's rights has not been institutionalized in the political structure and culture of the Afghan people. The main factor behind the failure of the government and the civil society and efforts for institutionalizing women's rights and promoting the respect for political, social and economic rights of women is the tradition and culture of the society and the difficulties to promote a culture of respect in the political and social relationship and political approach towards women's rights.

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Therefore, the issue of women's rights remains un-institutionalized and reversible, an issue that contributes to the concerns about the prospects of women's rights in regards with the political transition in 2014, and protecting the progress made in the past decade.

The 2014 and the development related to it such as the reduction of foreign forces and the changes in the structure of power will place Afghanistan in a critical condition, undergoing an important political transition since the fall of the Taliban. The political transition will include four important vital issues:

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political, social and economic spheres in the country.

The women and organizations defending their rights while understanding the challenges against improvement of women's conditions in Afghanistan, and paying respect to the religious values and acceptable national traditions, with a commitment to the promotion and protection of the democratic values and with the belief in establishing an Afghan national process, as the basis for the efforts for institutionalizing respect for the women's rights in the legal framework, following a one-day conference and discussions on the impediments, problems and concerns regarding the support and defense of Afghan women's rights, would like to turn the attention of the Afghan government and international community to the following concerns and recommendations for the support of women's rights, and the institutionalization of respect for the human dignity of women.

Organizations and institutions participating in the conference "Mobilization for the Participation of Women in the Political Transition of Afghanistan" express following concerns and recommendations, as follows:

1. We call upon the international community, especially the UN and its relevant organizations defending the women's rights to expand their activities in this critical juncture in the country in order to improve the political, economic and social conditions of the women and help its sustainability.
2. We ask the Afghan government to act in accordance with the international conventions and treaties that it is a member. In order for the laws to be implemented fully, it is important that the laws are protected and all the obstacles hindering their implementation are removed.
3. We would like to ask the High Peace Council that it should protect the progress made in the areas of women's rights in the past 12 years while negotiation with the insurgents. We would also like to ask for greater participation of women in the peace council.

4. As the parliament has the duty to protect the rights of the people that it is representing, we would like to ask the parliament to pass the Elimination of Violence against Women (EVAW) bill.

5. We would like to ask the independent election commission to provide the necessary ground for the participation of women in 2014 election.

6. We would like to ask the civil society organizations, especially those involved in defending the women's rights to take steps towards raising public awareness regarding the rights of women.

7. We would like to encourage all women in the eastern region to take part in the upcoming election and transfer of the authority so transitions towards peace and stability.

8. There is a need for women to play a role in the strengthening peace and stability which is in accordance with the resolution number 1325 of the UN Security Council. The participants of this conference recommends to the UN representative office to organize a dialogue program between the government and international community which will also include the civil society organizations. Such dialogues will play an important role in strengthen the government will in including the role of women in the peace process.

Declaration of Kunduz Regional Conference on Mobilization and Participation of Women in the Political Transition in Afghanistan

Northeast Zone(Kunduz, Takhar and Badakhshan)

During the past 12 years (since 2001) positive developments brought about as a result of the Bonn agreement and the establishment of a democratic system of government in Afghanistan has improved women's political, social and economic conditions as well as their rights. The provision of equal rights for women and men through the enactment of the new constitution in the Loya Jirga of 2004, are the basis of the political presence of women in the politics and society the outcome of which is the participation of women in the government institutions and other organizations. In addition to Afghanistan joining other international conventions such as the convention preventing discrimination against women, it should establish additional requirements for respect and support of women's rights in all areas in the country.

The steps taken to improve the condition for women directly or indirectly, has changed the debate over the women's rights to a pivotal issue in the prospects of state-building and democratization of the political structure in Afghanistan. In addition to establishing a human rights commission, the establishment of ministry of women affairs was reflective of pivotal importance of women's rights and the place of women in the power structure and shared understanding created for the support and defending women's rights in a consistent manner. Following these efforts and in light of the enforced internal laws and the international obligations especially the Afghanistan Compact agreed in London, and National Development Strategy of Afghanistan, the Afghan government has introduced a long term strategy in the framework of "Practical Program for Afghan Women 2007-2017", in 2007. The primary aim of this strategy was to establish a framework for the implementation of policies and commitments of the government for

improving the condition of women. In addition to these efforts by government, the issues of women's rights have gained importance in the activities of civil society organizations with several organizations being established in the past decade defending the rights of women. These organizations and the women's rights activists have been able to begin campaigns and efforts proportionate to their capacity promoting and improving the rights of women. In total, the legal and practical measures have created prospects for strengthening the presence of women in all areas of social life and have created an extraordinary potential for reinstating the position of women in the social and political spheres and defense of their rights.

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- 2- The upcoming presidential election and its potential impact on the political and social spheres.
- 3- The issue of talks with the Taliban and armed opposition of the government which is being overshadowed by political and social agendas completely different from accepted national principles.
- 4- The reduction of international community's financial support and the self-sufficiency of the Afghan government

These four issues are the vital indicators of political transition and determinant of stability and security, especially for the rights of women to participate in the

political, social and economic spheres in the country.

The women and organizations defending their rights while understanding the challenges against improvement of women's conditions in Afghanistan, and paying respect to the religious values and acceptable national traditions, with a commitment to the promotion and protection of the democratic values and with the belief in establishing an Afghan national process, as the basis for the efforts for institutionalizing respect for the women's rights in the legal framework, following a one-day conference and discussions on the impediments, problems and concerns regarding the support and defense of Afghan women's rights, would like to turn the attention of the Afghan government and international community to the following concerns and recommendations for the support of women's rights, and the institutionalization of respect for the human dignity of women.

Organizations and institutions participating in the conference "Mobilization for the Participation of Women in the Political Transition of Afghanistan" would like to present the following as determining factors of the situation of women in the periods following 2014.

1. Setting the future of the country to the right direction through election.
2. Transfer of security responsibility from the foreign forces to the internal Afghan forces.

Our existing concerns are as follows:

1. The impact of insecurity over the election and the current situation.
2. The reduction in support of the civil society organizations from the condition of women in the country.
3. Continued undesired traditions hampering the development of women's rights.
4. Reduction of aid aimed at improving the condition of women.

5. Reduction of employment opportunities for women.
6. Increasing violence against women.
7. Threats against girls' education.

Recommendations:

- The international community should strive to protect the progress made in the past 12 years in the areas of women's rights.
- The government should provide specific plans to reassure the protection of women's rights.
- The donor organizations should provide practical programs for the self-sufficiency of the civil movements.

The impact and consequences of negotiation with the Taliban and the prospects of women's rights in the country if the negotiations succeed in peace with the Taliban.

Positives outcomes:

1. If negotiation with the Taliban is carried out in accordance with the national and international laws and with respect to these laws that Afghanistan is a party to, there will not be problems against the condition of women in the country.
2. If the Taliban get ready for the peace negotiation, the current threats which has hampered the political participation of women and in other social arenas will vanish and their political participation will increase.
3. Reduction in harassment of women in the workplace and improvement in uprooting moral and administrative corruption.

Negative outcomes:

1. Threat against the progress made in the past 12 years, disappointment of women from the government, and distancing women from the political, social and cultural participation.
2. Loss of confidence on the government, rule of law,

the security situation, due to experience from the past.

3. The brain drain of educated women due to fear from lack of employment opportunity in the country and threats of crisis in the future.

4. Patriarchy and the expansion of the undesired traditions and customs in the urban areas.

5. Lack of interest by the donors defending women's rights and human rights and their withdrawal from the country.

Recommendations:

- First, the Taliban have not entered the political arena with specific objectives and specific leaders, then reconciliation with a group that has no specific leaders will have no results.
- Second, if the Taliban claim that they have specific objectives in accordance with the Islamic and human values, they should accept the Afghan Constitution and agree to the participation of women in all the areas of life within the Islamic framework.
- The government must implement programs supporting the women and progress made in this area.

Possible impacts of change in the political leadership in the presidential election and assessment of concerns in this area

With the changes in the political leadership as a result of the election, following possible positives impacts will come as a result:

Positive impacts:

1. Improvement of security in all over the country
2. Establishment of policies, changes of the policies, and implementation of policies for the good governance.
3. Resolution of the disputes between the Afghan government and its neighbors.

4. Preference given to meritocracy.
5. Improvement in the areas of education and employment opportunities.
6. Participation of women in the political and cultural processes.
7. Prevention from the human smuggling, especially the children.

Negative impacts:

1. Lack of security in the future government will cause the absence of talented individuals in the government cabinet and the youth participation in the decision making will remain symbolic.
2. Lack of policy changes and its implementation will cause the failure of the government.
3. The presence of anarchy as the government policy will not be implemented.
4. Preference given to the patronage system than the code of conduct will fail the government.
5. Unemployment of the youth will give raise to moral corruption, addition to the narcotics, and migration to outside the country.

The impacts of the transfer of security responsibility to the Afghan National Army and National Police over the condition of women in Afghanistan, especially the place where the current conference has been held.

1. The Police must be educated about the civil and military laws.
2. The recruitment offices must ensure this.
3. The economic situation must be taken into account, the police must be provided insurance.
4. With these aspects and conditioned being guaranteed, the Afghan police will have the ability to protect the country.
5. The high number of violence against women and lack of respect to the women's rights, the absence of women in the political arena, and lack of security.

6. If the rule of law prevails, there will be no negative effects. If the rule of law does not prevail, the warlords will eliminate the rights of women. This is one of the biggest fears of women.

The assessment of the reduction of international community's aid and prospects for women's economic situation.

Positive impacts:

1. People's engagement in the civil society activities.
2. The increasing obligation of the government and civil society in various areas.

Negative impacts:

1. Reduction of women's participation in various social and political areas.
2. The deterioration of the economic conditions of people, especially the women.
3. Increase in unemployment, poverty, and corruption in the society.

Solutions:

1. Changes in the delivery of aid (efforts must ensure that programs are implemented in the areas of capacity building of the civil society organizations for their self-sufficiency)
2. Holding conferences (for raising the knowledge of people in regards with civil society activities and their participation in the process)
3. Capacity building of the whole society.

Declaration of Mazare- Sharif Regional Conference on Mobilization and Participation of Women in the Political Transition in Afghanistan

North Zone (Balkh, Baghlan, Samangan, Jowzjan, Sar-e Pol and Faryab)

During the past 12 years (since 2001) positive developments brought about as a result of the Bonn agreement and the establishment of a democratic system of government in Afghanistan has improved women's political, social and economic conditions as well as their rights. The provision of equal rights for women and men through the enactment of the new constitution in the Loya Jirga of 2004, are the basis of the political presence of women in the politics and society the outcome of which is the participation of women in the government institutions and other organizations. In addition to Afghanistan joining other international conventions such as the convention preventing discrimination against women, it should establish additional requirements for respect and support of women's rights in all areas in the country.

The steps taken to improve the condition for women directly or indirectly, has changed the debate over the women's rights to a pivotal issue in the prospects of state-building and democratization of the political structure in Afghanistan. In addition to establishing a human rights commission, the establishment of ministry of women affairs was reflective of pivotal importance of women's rights and the place of women in the power structure and shared understanding created for the support and defending women's rights in a consistent manner. Following these efforts and in light of the enforced internal laws and the international obligations especially the Afghanistan Compact agreed in London, and National Development Strategy of Afghanistan, the Afghan government has introduced a long term strategy in the framework of "Practical Program for Afghan Women 2007-2017", in 2007. The primary aim of this strategy was to establish a framework for the implementation of policies and commitments of the government for

improving the condition of women. In addition to these efforts by government, the issues of women's rights have gained importance in the activities of civil society organizations with several organizations being established in the past decade defending the rights of women. These organizations and the women's rights activists have been able to begin campaigns and efforts proportionate to their capacity promoting and improving the rights of women. In total, the legal and practical measures have created prospects for strengthening the presence of women in all areas of social life and have created an extraordinary potential for reinstating the position of women in the social and political spheres and defense of their rights.

Notwithstanding all the efforts that have taken place so far, the achievements in the areas of women's rights seem insufficient and it is susceptible to reverse. Still majority of women in the country suffer from illiteracy and women in the society and in their families fall victims of widespread violence. Furthermore, the issue of women's rights has not been institutionalized in the political structure and culture of the Afghan people. The main factor behind the failure of the government and the civil society and efforts for institutionalizing women's rights and promoting the respect for political, social and economic rights of women is the tradition and culture of the society and the difficulties to promote a culture of respect in the political and social relationship and political approach towards women's rights.

The political approach towards women's rights can create challenge against a sustained civil movement. The political approach declines the rights of women from inherent and inalienable human rights to a political ploy being influenced by social development.

In addition to the numerous number of organizations, women's rights activists and women's rights networks and its multiplication, a remarkable capacity have been build in the recent years to defend from the rights of women in the national level. However, the organizational coordination and sporadic nature of activities taking place has reduced the impact of these organizations. As a result activities aimed at promoting women's rights activities have not been able to create a strong and powerful national voice for the defense and support of women's rights.

Therefore, the issue of women's rights remains un-institutionalized and reversible, an issue that contributes to the concerns about the prospects of women's rights in regards with the political transition in 2014, and protecting the progress made in the past decade.

The 2014 and the development related to it such as the reduction of foreign forces and the changes in the structure of power will place Afghanistan in a critical condition, undergoing an important political transition since the fall of the Taliban. The political transition will include four important vital issues:

- 1- Reduction/withdrawal of foreign forces and transfer of complete security responsibility, and the reduction of political support from the international community
- 2- The upcoming presidential election and its potential impact on the political and social spheres.
- 3- The issue of talks with the Taliban and armed opposition of the government which is being overshadowed by political and social agendas completely different from accepted national principles.
- 4- The reduction of international community's financial support and the self-sufficiency of the Afghan government

These four issues are the vital indicators of political transition and determinant of stability and security, especially for the rights of women to participate in the

political, social and economic spheres in the country.

The women and organizations defending their rights while understanding the challenges against improvement of women's conditions in Afghanistan, and paying respect to the religious values and acceptable national traditions, with a commitment to the promotion and protection of the democratic values and with the belief in establishing an Afghan national process, as the basis for the efforts for institutionalizing respect for the women's rights in the legal framework, following a one-day conference and discussions on the impediments, problems and concerns regarding the support and defense of Afghan women's rights, would like to turn the attention of the Afghan government and international community to the following concerns and recommendations for the support of women's rights, and the institutionalization of respect for the human dignity of women.

Organizations and institutions participating in the conference "Mobilization for the Participation of Women in the Political Transition of Afghanistan" express following concerns regarding the reduction of international aid and economic condition of women post-2014, as follows:

The participants of the conference call upon the government and international community to put into practice the following recommendations:

- 1- Approval of the Elimination of Violence against Women Law (EVAW)
- 2- Establishing and extending the special prosecutors offices prosecuting cases of violence against women in all provinces.
- 3- Strengthening programs for capacity building of women in all government agencies
- 4- Providing the opportunity for women to work in decision making positions
- 5- Following the peace negotiation with Taliban through a neutral mediator and protecting the progress made in the past twelve years while also

refraining from giving key ministries for the Taliban in case of power sharing.

6- Strengthening the private universities in the country

7- Providing opportunity for the inclusion of women in the security forces

8- The international community must continue supporting the women organizations

9- Providing employment opportunities for women

10- Mobilizing and encouraging women to take part in the election

11- Establishment of standard healthcare clinics for children and women and establishment of forensic department in all provinces.

Declaration of Women's Mobilization and Participation in Afghanistan's Political Transition

Central region (Kabul, Wardak, Parwan, Panjshir, Kapisa, Khost, Paktia, Paktika, and Logar)

During the past 12 years (since 2001) positive developments brought about as a result of the Bonn agreement and the establishment of a democratic system of government in Afghanistan has improved women's political, social and economic conditions as well as their rights. The provision of equal rights for women and men through the enactment of the new constitution in the Loya Jirga of 2004, are the basis of the political presence of women in the politics and society the outcome of which is the participation of women in the government institutions and other organizations. In addition to Afghanistan joining other international conventions such as the convention preventing discrimination against women, it should establish additional requirements for respect and support of women's rights in all areas in the country.

The steps taken to improve the condition for women directly or indirectly, has changed the debate over the women's rights to a pivotal issue in the prospects of state-building and democratization of the political structure in Afghanistan. In addition to establishing a human rights commission, the establishment of ministry of women affairs was reflective of pivotal importance of women's rights and the place of women in the power structure and shared understanding created for the support and defending women's rights in a consistent manner. Following these efforts and in light of the enforced internal laws and the international obligations especially the Afghanistan Compact agreed in London, and National Development Strategy of Afghanistan, the Afghan government has introduced a long term strategy in the framework of "Practical Program for Afghan Women 2007-2017", in 2007. The primary aim of this strategy was to establish a framework for the implementation of policies and commitments of the government for

improving the condition of women. In addition to these efforts by government, the issues of women's rights have gained importance in the activities of civil society organizations with several organizations being established in the past decade defending the rights of women. These organizations and the women's rights activists have been able to begin campaigns and efforts proportionate to their capacity promoting and improving the rights of women. In total, the legal and practical measures have created prospects for strengthening the presence of women in all areas of social life and have created an extraordinary potential for reinstating the position of women in the social and political spheres and defense of their rights.

Notwithstanding all the efforts that have taken place so far, the achievements in the areas of women's rights seem insufficient and it is susceptible to reverse. Still majority of women in the country suffer from illiteracy and women in the society and in their families fall victims of widespread violence. Furthermore, the issue of women's rights has not been institutionalized in the political structure and culture of the Afghan people. The main factor behind the failure of the government and the civil society and efforts for institutionalizing women's rights and promoting the respect for political, social and economic rights of women is the tradition and culture of the society and the difficulties to promote a culture of respect in the political and social relationship and political approach towards women's rights.

The political approach towards women's rights can create challenge against a sustained civil movement. The political approach declines the rights of women from inherent and inalienable human rights to a political ploy being influenced by social development.

In addition to the numerous number of organizations, women's rights activists and women's rights networks and its multiplication, a remarkable capacity have been build in the recent years to defend from the rights of women in the national level. However, the organizational coordination and sporadic nature of activities taking place has reduced the impact of these organizations. As a result activities aimed at promoting women's rights activities have not been able to create a strong and powerful national voice for the defense and support of women's rights.

Therefore, the issue of women's rights remains un-institutionalized and reversible, an issue that contributes to the concerns about the prospects of women's rights in regards with the political transition in 2014, and protecting the progress made in the past decade.

The 2014 and the development related to it such as the reduction of foreign forces and the changes in the structure of power will place Afghanistan in a critical condition, undergoing an important political transition since the fall of the Taliban. The political transition will include four important vital issues:

- 1- Reduction/withdrawal of foreign forces and transfer of complete security responsibility, and the reduction of political support from the international community
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The women and representatives from 54 organizations defending women's rights in the central regional (Kabul, Wardak, Parwan, Panjshir, Kapisa, Khost, Paktiya, Paktika and Logar) provide their following views and recommendations.

Reconciliation

- 1- We emphasize on the women's rights during the reconciliation process and that it is should be mentioned as an article of any reconciliation agreement.
- 2- Respect for the Afghan Constitution.
- 3- Barring the Taliban from gaining senior political positions
- 4- Guaranteeing access of women to their rights.
- 5- Emphasis on women's activities in various areas such as (social, cultural, political, and economic)
- 6- Attention must be paid to the Islamic values.

Election

- 1- Raising public awareness of women regarding election through the mass media, conferences, and seminars.

2- Establishing safe places for women to take part in the elections.

3- Providing awareness to women about their role and importance to take part in the election.

4- Respect by the government and executive agencies for women's participation in the election.

5- Getting the approval of men for the participation of women in the election.

6- Coordination with the religious scholars to encourage women's participation in the election.

7- Efforts must be made to hold a transparent election under the observation of the international community, civil society, and media.

8- Providing the necessary ground for the participation of women in the election and giving the role in the government administration.

Transfer of security responsibility

- Provision of security to a satisfactory level.

- Provision of public awareness for people in the areas of human rights.

- International community's consistent attention towards the women's rights

- Monitoring of the activities of security forces in maintaining the rights of women.

- Action on the promises made by the international community in the previous conferences held on the security, peace and women's rights.

Declaration of Women's Mobilization and Participation in Afghanistan's Political Transition

Southern region (Kandahar, Uruzgan, Helmand, Zabul)

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Organizations and institutions participating in the conference "Mobilization for the Participation of Women in the Political Transition of Afghanistan" express following concerns regarding the reduction of international aid and economic condition of women post-2014, as follows:

The participants of the conference call upon the government and international community to put into practice the following recommendations:

1. We ask the international community to bolster its programs for improvement of women activities in the areas of social, economic and political and expand its public awareness programs.
2. We would like the Afghan government to prevent violence against women and to step up more efforts to provide solutions to the problems that women are facing in the country.
3. We would also like to ask the High Peace Council to provide more opportunity for the participation of women in the council.
4. The Afghan Parliament must pass the Elimination of Violence against Women (EVAW) bill.
5. We would like to ask for increased participation of

women in the Afghan Election Commission in 2014 so the women it can help their increased involvement in the political arena.

6. We ask the civil society organizations to increase its activities in preventing violence against women and bolster their economic activities as well provision of support to the talented women in the country.

7. The women can play important role in the peace and security when they receive consistent support from the United Nations.

8. The women in Kandahar express their full participation in the election.

9. The women in Kandahar fear that the situation will reverse back to the 12 years ago where they faced with violence, however they believe this will not happen as the women have complete control over their rights and nothing will prevent their progress.

Annex VII: Afghanistan Watch Publications

A. Latest Publications

1. Viewpoints Series III: Fears and Hopes in 2014 Transition; Report on Public Opinion about Fears and Hopes in 34 Provinces of Afghanistan
2. Women Participation in two past Parliamentary elections
3. Dawa Ya Bala? (Implications of Kilij Coal Mine Closure for Bamyan's Security Situation)
4. Afghan Media Analysis, themes Trends and Implications
5. Blood Diamond (Afghanistan Natural Resources and the Lessons Learnt from Zimbabwe)
6. Caught Between Past and Present(Consultation with Victims of Three Massacres in Afghanistan: 15 March 1979 Herat, February 1993 Afshar and August 1998 Balkh)
7. Natural Resources and Conflict in Afghanistan
8. Haqiqat/Truth Newsletter [Monthly Publication]
9. Negotiation with Insurgents in the Afghan Print Media
10. View Points, Series 1: Political Settlement and Negotiation with Taliban
11. The First Experience [Voting Patterns and Political Alignments in Wolesi Jirga](2005-2010)
12. Charting a Course for a Sustainable Peace, Linking Transitional Justice and Reconciliation in Afghanistan
13. International Criminal Court (ICC) in Afghanistan
14. Transitional Justice in Afghanistan; End or New Beginning?
15. Between Impunity and Accountability

B. Forthcomming Publications

1. Prospects and Challenges of Afghanistan's Rapidly Expanding Private Higher Education
2. Disappeared in the Dark: Summary Executions, Arbitrary Use of Force and Enforced Disappearances during and after the 24 Hut Massacre of 1357 in Herat
3. Report on the Mazar Massacre(1998)
4. Report on the Afshar Massacre(1993)
5. Baghlan Mining Mapping Report
6. Sari Pul Mining Mapping Report
7. Natural Resources Training Manual for Civil Society