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Afghan Women's Network

November 2018

Position Paper: Reiterating Voices from Afghan Women – from BCA to GCA

1. About the Afghan Women's Network

The Afghan Women's Network¹ (AWN) is an umbrella organization that represents more than 3,500 individual members and 140 women's organizations. AWN has an active and considerable presence in Kabul, Herat, Balkh, Kandahar, Bamyan, Paktia, Nangarhar and Kunduz and is also active through its members across other provinces of Afghanistan. AWN carries out policy advocacy, awareness-raising, capacity-building, and networking initiatives related to gender-based violence; women, peace and security; women's leadership and political participation; and women's legal and social rights, in close collaboration with its organizational and individual members.

2. Background

After 9/11 and the fall of the Taliban regime, Afghan women once again struggled to make historic contributions for an improved and equal environment for women and girls, who comprise more than half of the population, as well as broader development for the country. In the past 17 years, Afghan women have worked hard to emphasize and advocate for their inclusive and meaningful participation in public and social life, including their role as decision makers. Women have watched the slow progress across the sectors of peace processes, political participation, and social and legal protection. They have also raised credible concerns and provided key solutions for their meaningful and equal participation.

Afghanistan has been at the forefront of discussion amongst global policy makers for the past 17 years. The international community and the Afghan Government have repeatedly met over the past decades to discuss the development of the country, measure progress, and agree on mechanisms and approaches to improve accountability for results. This includes outcomes from the Tokyo Conference in 2012², the London Conference in 2014³, and the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan on 2016⁴. In 2011, at the Bonn conference on Afghanistan, the international community agreed on a "Transformation Decade" for Afghanistan and committed to supporting Afghanistan to achieve self-reliance by 2024.

In 2018, ahead of the Geneva Conference on Afghanistan, AWN led a series of consultations and Focus Group Discussions with women and women-focused organizations from diverse backgrounds in eight zones of Afghanistan (Kabul, Nangarhar, Kunduz, Herat, Paktia, Kandahar, Bamyan, and Balkh). These consultations focused on three main topics (1) Women, Peace and Security; (2) Women's Political

¹ [Afghan Women's Network \(2018\)](#).

² [Tokyo Declaration \(2012\)](#).

³ [Communique, London Conference \(2014\)](#).

⁴ [Brussels Conference \(2016\)](#).

Participation; and (3) Women's Social and Legal Protection. Through this Position Paper, AWN shares the voices of these women from 34 provinces who have shared their views on the current situation of Afghan women, the existing issues and their calls and recommendations both for the Afghan Government and international community. The following priorities include specific recommendations.

Women's Position on Peace and Security:

1. Afghan women call for their full, equal and meaningful participation in all peace talks (agenda setting, programming and implementation). Women, like men, have knowledge, solutions and key suggestions and a right to participate. Any formal and informal meeting where women have not taken part will not be legitimate. In addition, we demand the full implementation of the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, which includes specific provisions on women's participation in the peace process.
2. Afghan women emphasized and will continue to emphasize the need for a transparent and accountable peace process. The peace process in Afghanistan urgently requires monitoring and women's expertise in order to protect women's red lines; support justice for victims of violence and wars; and prevent a culture of impunity.
3. The Afghanistan Islamic Law and the Afghan Constitution have provided women and men with equal rights. No internal groups or foreigners can take decision on behalf of the Afghan population, which includes approximately 15 million Afghan women.

To the International Community, Especially the Countries Involved in the Afghan Peace Process;

1. Afghan women are advocating for their full, equal and meaningful participation in all peace talks with opposition groups. We insist on the presence of women in peace talks so that we can raise women's concerns and broad solutions with opposition groups and be included in all decision-making on equal ground. Any type of facilitation and direct communication with the Taliban to negotiate peace without the participation of women, who comprise over than half of population, is unacceptable.
2. We call for serious consideration within the discussions and decisions of various governments regarding the Afghan peace process to facilitate and ensure women's meaningful participation, inclusiveness, transparency, and accountability. The achievements and advancements of Afghan women should not be sacrificed by the international community, political parties and groups involved in the war in Afghanistan. We do not accept any preconditions preventing the participation of women in the peace process or solutions that harm and curtail their rights

Women Political Participation and Leadership;

1. Afghan women have a high degree of political awareness and are experienced actors in political life, most recently demonstrated by their active role as representatives, candidates, voters, and employees of the Independent Election Commission and the Election Complaint Commission. We call on the National Unity Government to pay close attention to and further support women's political participation and roles in decision-making at the national and local levels.
2. Qualified Afghan women leaders face persistent barriers to participation and their representation remains below 30% in leadership roles and as government employees. Serious attention is needed in this regard.
3. Women and girls in the provinces face even greater obstacles to equal participation. The role of women at the provincial level is very limited and often results in no participation at all. The lack of political support for women's participation, lack of access to education and training, and the practice of harmful traditions prevent women from being more active in the provinces. Awareness at the provincial level on participation and access to educational opportunities for women and girls is a serious need. We demand specific programs to strengthen women's access to meaningful participatory roles and leadership at the provincial level.

Women's Legal and Social Protection;

1. Although Afghanistan has important laws, policies and action plans on women's legal and social protection, there is limited and weak implementation and monitoring. The Afghan Government and the international community need serious planning and investment to improve access to justice for all, especially women, the introduction of an implementation strategy for all laws and policies related to women's legal and social protection, and monitoring mechanism to ensure implementation at all levels.
2. Afghanistan's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security needs to be reviewed. The Action Plan is still not being fully implemented and it is not localized. Three years after the publication of the Plan, there is still no information on monitoring and the specific budget for its implementation. Afghan women require access to monitor the Plan's implementation and call for transparency, timely reporting, and access to information.
3. Violence against women also remains a serious concern for women and girls. Despite the Law on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW), Anti – Harassment Law, the EVAW Commission, and the Special Attorney General, the implementation of both laws in the country remains weak. Women and girls, as well as broader communities, are not yet aware of these laws. We demand long-term plans to build awareness and monitor the implementation of the EVAW Law and other supportive Laws.
4. Provision of working environments for all eligible citizens is the duty of the Government. Unfortunately, many women and girls remain home after graduating from their higher education due to lack of job opportunities and other factors. The Government is responsible for ensuring working environments remain free of any discrimination and harassment for all, especially women and girls. We are focusing on specific programs for providing job opportunities for women and girls at provincial level and call on the Afghan Government to take tangible steps as well.

3. Conclusion

Afghan women are advocating for their full, equal and meaningful participation at all levels (programming, agenda setting, participation and implementation). This Position Paper outlines the priorities and recommendations of Afghan women engaged through AWN. We insist on the presence and full, equal and meaningful participation of women in peace talks, so that we can raise women's concerns and solutions and be included in all decisions on equal ground. The legitimacy and sustainability of peace depends on the full, equal and meaningful participation of women.