

Afghan Women Demand a Just and Accountable Peace

11th September 2020

Dear Leaders of the Member States of NATO and the United Nations,

As we mark nineteen years since the devastating attack on the World Trade Center which claimed more than 3,000 innocent lives, and the ousting of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, we send this letter on behalf of 15,000¹ Afghan women from across Afghanistan to thank our international allies for their sacrifices and support in helping us rebuild our democratic systems, broken institutions, and empowering our youth to use their energy and talent for developing our country.

The ups and downs of the past nineteen years have made us stronger in our resolve, commitment and dedication for a just and sustainable peace. Now that we are at a critical juncture in our modern history, we are both hopeful and fearful. We are hopeful that the peace process will end the four decades of violence and bloodshed in our beloved country. Yet we are fearful that our gains of the past two decades are at danger of being eroded if the Taliban return to Afghanistan with the same mentality, ambition and behavior as in the 1990s when they turned our cities and villages into ghost towns and allowed safe havens for regional and global terrorist groups, including Al-Qaeda.

We acknowledge and appreciate the efforts and commitment of the international community in fighting terrorism and supporting Afghanistan to rise from the ashes. We also recognize and honor the sacrifices of our people in assisting your troops to root out terrorism from Afghanistan so that our mountains and valleys will never become an operation ground against your people by Al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups. Afghans, especially the women, have endured the most burden of the war against terror. The emotional toll of this bloody war cannot be described in words. Indeed, the trauma, the pain of losing loved ones, the poverty and displacement and the destruction of our homes and schools have left lifelong physical and mental scars. More than anyone, we the women of Afghanistan want an end to the war but we fear the end of this war is not peace. To us, peace is more than an absence of war. It is the protection of rights of all citizens, social justice, economic prosperity and just and equal distribution of resources. It is the equal participation of men and women in rebuilding our beloved country, without fear of being persecuted because of our gender, ethnicity, religion and political affiliation.

We, the women of Afghanistan, welcome the peace process and are fully committed to supporting the process, including reconciliation with the Taliban despite their past violence. We have come to terms to accept the Taliban as a political group. We are ready to help them reintegrate in to civilian life. At the same time, we expect Taliban to acknowledge and accept the fact that the Afghan population is comprised of diverse ethnic and religious groups, more than 50% of the population are women and more than 70% are

¹ Provincial Women Networks (PWNS) active in fifteen provinces of Afghanistan, bring together women from different walks of life to jointly advocate for peace and good governance. PWNS in collaboration with Musharikat - Women In Peace (WIP) coalition members have consulted with women in their communities, collected their signatures and compiled their voices in this letter.

youth who deserve to exercise their basic rights enshrined in our constitution. We implore them to stop using violence and begin exploring civic means to pursue their political agenda.

We accept that the time has come for us to deliberate amongst ourselves and discuss our differences peacefully to reach a durable peace. However, we also recognize that Afghanistan's vicious cycle of conflict has regional and international dimensions beyond its domestic implications and challenges. We therefore, call on members of the NATO countries and the United Nations to stand with us in this difficult and uncertain time, and to not abandon Afghanistan in return for a quick fix peace deal that is doomed to fail and more likely turn Afghanistan into a safe haven for international terrorism once again. Allies do not walk out on their allies. Stand with us to protect the gains of the past two decades. These gains are not only of Afghan people. You have been a big part of these gains. Together, we have taken and walked many hard steps. Despite our shortcomings, we have worked hard for our country to become a member of the global village that values international norms and treaties that connect us with the rest of the world.

Our specific requests are:

- Create an international mechanism to monitor the peace process to ensure accountability and sustainability;
- Continue your assistance to the Afghan security forces to defend its territories and protect the rights of Afghan citizens;
- Use your leverage with the Afghan government, political parties and the Taliban to support the meaningful and equal participation of women, youth, victims of war, minorities, civil society and the media to have balance between politics and civil society.
- Put pressure on the Taliban to agree to a permanent humanitarian ceasefire;
- Impose financial and travel restrictions on government officials, political leaders and the Taliban if they fail to protect the rights of all Afghan citizens and oppose preserving the gains of the past two decades. We propose the restrictions to also include a travel ban and freezing of overseas bank accounts and assets of those who violate the terms of the agreement;
- Channel financial aid to Afghanistan towards unwavering respect for universal human rights, especially of girls and women, and minorities; and
- Enhance regional cooperation in the fight against terrorism and extremism, economic development and resolving regional conflicts through diplomacy;

We believe that we have come a long way towards building a self-reliant Afghanistan. Let us not lose our strategic patience in actualizing our vision of securing a long-lasting, just and dignified peace so that our children live in peace, our youth participate in rebuilding a prosperous Afghanistan, and that our country does not become a safe haven for terrorist groups again.

Sincerely yours

Provincial Women's Networks and Women in Peace Coalition