

Provincial Women's Networks Perspectives and Recommendations for Intra-Afghan Negotiations

15th August 2020

About Provincial Women's Networks (PWNs)

Registered with Ministry of Justice of Afghanistan as grassroots networks PWNs are bringing women together from different walks of life in each province to build trust and confidence, make alliances with different actors and work in their communities towards conflict resolution, peacebuilding and service delivery. The PWNs are active with 30 to 40 members in 15 provinces (Kabul, Parwan, Bamiyan, Daikundi, Helmand, Kandahar, Uruzgan, Paktya, Nangarhar, Laghman, Kunduz, Badakhshan, Balkh, Faryab and Herat). These networks were established by EQUALITY for Peace and Democracy (EPD) in seven provinces in 2012 and later expanded to cover fifteen provinces with technical support from Cordaid. The members are receiving tailored trainings and capacity buildings that are based on their needs to become more effective mediators and peacebuilders in their communities. As of now they have mediated, advocated and resolved more than 1,118 cases, which includes conflicts resolution cases, violence against women cases, prevention of child marriages, educating and empowering women, job placements, women's political participation and promoting girls education in their communities. PWN members are also meeting on a regular basis among themselves to exchange ideas and share knowledge with each other as well as interact with women leaders, policy makers and others presenting their perspectives about conflict, peace and governance.

Following the historic National Consultative Peace Jirga, which endorsed the release of the remaining 400 Taliban prisoners, all milestones for beginning the Intra-Afghan negotiations are achieved. Now no side has any excuse for delaying the negotiations. We, the members of Provincial Women's Network from 15 provinces of Afghanistan, would like to encourage both the government and Taliban to respect the call of Jirga delegates for beginning the negotiations as soon as possible.

Afghanistan has been in conflict for four decades and we have lost millions of our people to the imposed war. Continuation of war will do nothing but further destroy our homeland, claim more innocent lives and create more hatred and grievances among our people. We believe that by talking to each other and having an honest dialogue we can resolve our issues. Today the whole world is encouraging Afghans to produce a peaceful settlement and we as citizens of this country need to cautiously and responsibly use this opportunity to end the bloodshed, learn to embrace our diversities and live in harmony. As leaders of this poor nation, we have a responsibility towards our youth and children who are Afghanistan of today and tomorrow. The vast majority of our youth and children are faced with enormous challenges due to insecurity. While the majority of youth and children in the region and around the world enjoy access to services, education and recreation, our youth and children have to carry the burden of violence. Our youth is often viewed as threats to security because of their vulnerability and susceptibility to recruitment by armed groups. We believe that with proper support and empowerment young Afghan men and women can be agents of change. Like youth anywhere in the world, Afghan youth have enthusiasm, creativity and motivation to make things better. When the government and the society fail to channel their energy into positive actions, they look for other means and that is when terrorist groups exploit their vulnerability and recruit them. The time has come that leaders must think about their peoples' needs, concerns and potential. It is time to put their personal interests and differences aside for the good of the country.

Knowing the domestic, regional and international dimensions of Afghanistan conflict, we call on all actors including government, Taliban, Afghan women and men leaders, religious actors, tribal elders, neighboring countries and international community to consider the following recommendations during the Intra-Afghan negotiations for securing a sustainable peace deal.

Ceasefire

We urge all parties engaged in the first Intra-Afghan negotiation to agree on a humanitarian ceasefire. It is unjust that political elites of both sides have peaceful dialogues in foreign countries while innocent Afghans pay the price with their precious lives. We expect you to understand and comprehend people's frustration with war and desire for peace. Despite all frustrations that we have with the Taliban, government and all politicians, we are hopeful that you will reach an agreement for a political settlement to end the bloodshed. As history has shown, we understand that in a peace deal political powers and resources will be distributed among political elite and not the people who have remained neutral. A ceasefire will benefit us all. Thus, all sides of conflict should demonstrate their support and political will for peace by ceasing hostilities and offensive operations until a political settlement is reached. The humanitarian ceasefire **must** be respected by all sides and any party guilty of attacks during the ceasefire should be held accountable. We therefore call on:

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1. **The Government and Taliban** to agree on a ceasefire in the first Intra-Afghan negotiation and genuinely ensure its implementation.
2. **The CSOs** to develop an independent mechanism to monitor implementation of the ceasefire through which the violators should be exposed.
3. **The International Community** to monitor the ceasefire agreement and hold accountable any side violating the ceasefire agreement.

Meaningful Representation

For us, our representation is meaningful only when at least 30% participants of any peace dialogue at any level are women with a proven record of promoting, protecting and defending women's rights. While we appreciate the efforts of government hosting the gathering of Consultative Peace Jirga in a very short time, having only 730 women from 3,400 delegates (21%) is not acceptable. We applaud the efforts of women leaders from across the country for representing and raising their voices in different platforms including the recent Jirga and first Intra-Afghan dialogue. We encourage women leaders to continue their noble efforts representing us in different platforms and promoting our basic universal rights; however, you have to remain connected with us and have regular consultations to discuss our concerns and recommendations. We, the members of women networks from 15 provinces, will only support those representatives of us who respect the principles of transparency and accountability by regular engagement with women groups in Kabul and provinces. We therefore call on:

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1. **Women Leaders** to continue your engagements and consultations with women groups and victims across the country, present our perspectives in all dialogues and not compromise our rights without our knowledge and consensus.
2. **Government** should demonstrate its commitments and seriousness about women's rights and participation by ensuring that at least 30% of all peace events participants are women with proven record of defending women's rights, living in Afghanistan and actively engaged with their constituencies.
3. **Taliban** should include women in their teams, those from inside Afghanistan, and ensure their participation in dialogues to present their concerns and recommendations in these platforms.
4. **International Community** should respect and implement the recommendation of 30% of qualified women as mentioned above in all dialogues by requiring the international/national organizers of the events as well as the government and Taliban. That should include women who are not fluent in English or other international languages.

Consistency and Unity

Unity among different Afghan mainstream groups including political parties, civil society, women groups, youth groups, religious leaders and community elders is crucial at this juncture of peace process in Afghanistan. All mainstream groups have to set aside their differences and work together for peace and the national interest of our country. These mainstream groups should be united and consistent with their messages and statements in peace dialogues and negotiations and should not undermine and discredit one another. We also expect unity and consistency from our international partners. We expect them to be as firm about women's, minorities' and victims' rights as they were in 2002. Our unity and consistency will help Taliban see the new Afghanistan where different and diverse groups join hands for a national cause. We therefore call on:

The mainstream groups should be united and consistent with their messages and statements in peace dialogues and negotiations and should not undermine and discredit one another.

We expect the international community to be as firm about women's, minorities' and victims' rights as they were in 2002.

1. **Women Leaders** to support each other, build alliances with men who believe and support women's, minorities' and victim's rights and to be united, firm and consistent with their messages and recommendations. We urge you to not allow anyone mistreat or disrespect women in events.
1. **High Council for National Reconciliation** to focus on engaging with groups in different sectors especially the victims of war and all men and women politicians to ensure their unity and support for the peace process, protection of achievements and to not spoil the peace process.
2. **International Community**, especially the United States of America, to continue advocating for values and principles of human rights and women's rights, the rights of minorities and victims when they meet with the Taliban, Afghan government or opposition groups.

Dialogues

While political elites have political conflicts challenging each other, they or their family members never go to the battlefield to witness and realize the cost of war and destruction. It is the poor people at the grassroots who face violence and attacks, whose lives are scarred and whose families are deprived of education and development. Furthermore, lack of good governance and rule of law have affected people at the grassroots more than any other group. We believe that beside the international and national peace events and dialogues where elites discuss and are focused on power sharing rather than critical human issues, we need to have series of community dialogues with people at the grassroots level to build trust, share grievances, views and suggestions for improving governance, rule of law and public accountability. Effective reintegration of former fighters and their families, and a dignified return of refugees from the neighboring countries is very important for sustainable peace. We therefore call on:

1. **High Council for National Reconciliation** to continue engaging with people especially the victims in the province for confidence building, hearing their grievances and perspectives, and consider their recommendations to ensure their support for peace process.
2. **All Public Institutions** to engage with different groups in their sectors as their equal partners and seek their support and advise on how all actors in different sectors could support the peace process.
3. **Civil Society Organizations** to organize dialogues for men and women among community members, Taliban and government representatives to discuss roots of conflict, community challenges with governance and rule of law, recommendations for improvements and share the reports with the government, men and women leaders, media, Taliban and the international community to review the findings and address the issues.

Reintegration

Proper reconciliation and reintegration of Taliban into their communities is essential for sustainable peace. The 2002 and 2010 disarmament and reintegration programs have important lessons for us to learn for designing a more effective and constructive program. We believe that besides creating platforms for dialogues, we also have to create employment opportunities for the Taliban fighters to enable them to generate income for their families. Otherwise there is a serious risk of them joining some other militias groups and continue to pose threats to peace and security. We therefore call on:

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1. **Negotiation Teams** on both sides to arrange consultative meetings on disarmament and reintegration, review the previous programs, identify the internal and external factors for failures and achievements of the programs and begin working on a demobilization, repatriation, reintegration and resettlement program to be implemented immediately after peace deal.
2. **Civil Society Organizations** to conduct research in country and review demobilization, repatriation, reintegration and resettlement programs of other countries and present recommendations to High Council for National Reconciliation.
3. **Taliban Leaders** to inspire and motivate their fighters to put down their guns, handover their arms and join the reconciliation and reintegration program.

Monitoring

Speaking about peace on one hand and continuing violence on the other hand is not an acceptable tactic. During the reduction of violence period and temporary ceasefires, we observed that while both the government and Taliban agreed, subsequent attacks continued. Further, they publicly blamed one another. We need to have independent monitoring mechanisms in place to scrutinize every step of the peace process and independently report to the people; thereby, exposing the spoilers of the process. For example, the release of prisoners should be monitored in a way that the prisoners should not go back to fighting and if that happens, Taliban should be made accountable. We therefore call on:

We need to have independent monitoring mechanisms in place to scrutinize every step of the peace process and independently report to the people; thereby, exposing the spoilers of the process.

1. **Negotiation Teams** on both sides to agree and put in place an independent monitoring mechanism for monitoring the whole process and producing independent monitoring reports.
2. **Civil Society Organizations** to develop community level monitoring mechanisms and publicly report on implementation of every step of the process at the community level and share their findings publicly.
3. **International Community, especially the United States of America** to remain the guarantor of peace deal and hold any group or state accountable who is spoiling the peace process.

In conclusion, we believe we are closer to a peace deal than ever before. We appreciate the efforts of all sides and the support of the international community. We once again want to reiterate that any conflict could be resolved by dialogue and we are optimistic that Afghan government, Taliban, US and the rest of international community will honor their promises and help us rebuild our country and live in peace. We hope we shall soon witness peace to do justice to our motherland and make it a secure and better place for our brothers and sisters so that no Afghans have to travel to another country for medical treatment, labor work, or escape violence, discrimination and injustice in their own country.

NOTE: This paper is developed by Afghan women from 15 provinces in three days, which we hope can demonstrate the capacity of Afghan women, connectivity of urban and rural women and our clarity on the way forward to sustainable peace. We do not want the International Community to fight our battle. All we ask of you is to not leave us alone on the battlefield. Support us to continue our struggle for universal human rights.