

1 Introduction

Since its inception in June 2010, the Afghan government's Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP) has been working to find a political solution to the ongoing conflict. We appreciate the efforts of the Joint Secretariat (JS) and High Peace Council (HPC) of the APRP to engage with civil society actors, especially the 22 January 2013 meeting called by the leadership of the HPC, where a request was made to a smaller group of civil society organizations (CSOs) to outline how civil society can support the peace process. With this document, the signatory civil society organizations (CSOs), with reach to diverse sectors of civil society in Afghanistan, both modern (NGOs, women's, youth groups, media, professional association) and traditional (community elders, religious/spiritual leaders), would like to reaffirm their support to the national peace process in Afghanistan. We do not see such collaboration as one exclusively shaped by a project framework but by one where the added value of civil society is fundamentally acknowledged and harnessed.

Even though we fully understand that the ultimate impetus for bringing peace has to come from political actors and conflict parties, reinforced by regional and international stakeholders, we a diverse group of civil society actors believe that we can play an important supportive role to revive the current peace process and make it more inclusive and sustainable.

We call on the HPC/JS to show greater political will and improve its uneven and *ad hoc* engagement with CSOs, especially women, into a more systematic, sustained and transparent cooperation and communication, especially at the provincial and district levels. It is important to not allow the enemies of peace in Afghanistan to take advantage of a fragmented peace effort, where the Afghan government does not provide an enabling environment for civil society, especially women, to play a supportive role at the grass roots level.

We fundamentally believe that peace is only possible if we reach out to all sectors of society and facilitate a participatory and bottom-up process that builds on inclusive-enough coalitions for durable peace. Achieving peace needs to be seen as a process, not individual reintegration events, whereby communities are empowered to resolve their grievances and conflicts amicable. For grievance resolution to be successful we need to utilize a do-no-harm approach and understand those issues that divide and connect people, as well as key conflict drivers.¹ Otherwise, instead of supporting community cohesion and resilience, we may inadvertently strengthen dividers which continue to fragment communities and cause conflict. Benefits of peace—or peace dividends—need to be made available to communities, rather than reintegrating fighters. Communities need to own the process and benefit from it, be given support to improve sub-national governance, conflict resolution mechanisms, access to justice, service delivery and economic development, as it is them who have to absorb reintegrating fighters and bear the brunt of any backlash if reconciliation and reintegration fails.

We believe that peace and reconciliation is about a mutual understanding of what matters to the majority in society, but more importantly also how it protects the rights

¹ CDA Collaborative Learning Projects (2004) *The 'Do No Harm' Framework for Analysing the Impact of Assistance on Conflict: A Handbook*; (Cambridge, MA: CDA Collaborative Learning Projects); <http://www.cdainc.com/dnh/docs/DoNoHarmHandbook.pdf> (accessed 5 December 2012), p.5

of its weakest members. For peace to be sustainable, outcomes need to be inclusive of accepting the opinions, values and rights of all, especially that of women and marginalized communities. It is about finding compromises and not elite dominated outcomes.

2 The Role of Civil Society in Peace Processes

Any successful peace process needs the active support and participation of civil society. Research has shown that “eminent civil society persons (often religious or community leaders) can be very effective in paving the way to official negotiations and supporting the official mediators in times deadlocks.” The distinct advantages of CSOs, as non-state and independent actors adhering to humanitarian principles, are:

- The fundamental diversity of civil society, both modern (e.g., women’s and youth groups, media, professional association) and traditional (community elders, religious and spiritual leaders), which if engaged fully and systematically can **facilitate a truly participatory process and build inclusive-enough coalitions** for durable peace.
- To function as **an impartial and independent facilitator** between the Afghan government and other stakeholders; and provide a neutral platform for dialogue among communities.
- To function as **a multiplier** by harnessing our extensive networks among the grass-roots level, by identifying and encouraging into the process trusted and “neutral community elders, religious figures, women and youth actors.”
- Building a bridge to grass-roots communities, are in a position to gauge community needs and/or views, “promote community mobilization with direct links to trust building efforts between people and government,” as well as being able to **facilitate local peace processes** by reaching out to insurgent groups and help **mediate grievances**.

Success can only come when **ownership is achieved**, by including men and women, young and old, modern and traditional, religious and secular, majority and minority, especially marginalized communities such as ethnic minorities, Kuchi nomads and internally displaced populations. We want to especially emphasize that as constituting half of Afghan society, “women’s equal involvement in the process is [absolutely] essential.”

3 Possible Areas of Cooperation

Building on prior JS/HPC-civil society discussions, as well as numerous civil society documents, including one presented to the APRP Review Conference in May 2011,² this document highlights some areas where civil society could strengthen and enhance the peace process, both in terms of increasing breadth and depth as well as reaching-out to the grassroots level.³ The activities are seen as supporting the main APRP phases: outreach, demobilisation and community rehabilitation—especially in ensuring to find “bottom up solutions for reintegration.”

² The Liaison Office (2011) *How Civil Society can assist and enhance the APRP*; paper presented at the APRP Review Conference (Kabul, Afghanistan; 10-11 May 2011) at the request of the APRP Secretariat.

³ Those in quotation marks are taken from recommendations put forth in: Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme (APRP), 2011, *Conclusion Paper of APRP Review Conference*, Kabul, Afghanistan, May 10-11, 2011; p.6

We hope that with these suggestions we can revive the momentum of JS/HPC-civil society collaboration and be a step closer into the direction of finalizing a concrete action plan for implementation. Much of what is proposed here, however, needs the support and political will of the HPC/JS, mostly in the form of providing an enabling environment for CSOs to work for peace, while at the same time respecting our independence in order not to compromise the very strength we bring to the peace process. By joining efforts, and with the HPC/JS capitalizing on our strengths, and allowing us to add value to the APRP, we believe that peace is possible.

Community Consultations and Confidence-Building Efforts: Local ownership is the backbone for sustainable peace, thus communities should have a say who they wish to reintegrate and most importantly, how associated APRP benefit packages (e.g., development, education, economic stimulation) benefit their society. This calls for an on-going dialogue between relevant APRP bodies and different sectors of Afghan society, especially at the grass-roots level. CSOs can facilitate such interactions in the form of discussions platforms, provincial and national debates or more localized brainstorming sessions. Important is to ensure that the diverse voices of Afghan society, incl. marginalized groups, are being heard. “Inclusive-enough” coalitions of “community leaders, business, and civil society,” but also civil society organization and women’s group should be pursued, as they can play “important roles in restoring confidence and sustaining the momentum for recovery and transformation.”⁴ Another option is forming “District peace and reconciliation committees that are comprised of different civil society actors/groups,” reflecting the diversity of civil society in each region.

Grievance Resolution Support: As impartial actors, civil society actors can play an important role in help to facilitate initial negotiations for brining insurgents back into the folds of community. Here grievance resolution, a key component of the APRP, deserves more concerted efforts. At present, the lack of mechanisms to voice and address historic and more recent grievances has contributed to an increased polarization in Afghan society. There is a need to ensure the support of non-violent forms of conflict resolution, elements of transitional justice, such facilitating “customary justice providers to support restorative justice as a mechanism to reconcile insurgents into communities.” Here women’s rights should be linked with customary mechanisms, and concepts such as *nanawati* should be called upon.

Capacity Building: In addition to facilitating grievance resolution, CSOs have a great deal of experience in teaching mediation and non-violent conflict resolution skills, as well as peace education, at district and provincial levels to key stakeholders within the government and civilian communities in order to enhance grievance resolution. CSOs can also provide skilled facilitators; help to facilitate outcome-oriented workshops and discussion forums; provide background presentations and identified grass-roots participants.

Peace Education and promoting a culture of peace: A culture of peace is important in order to counter a society that has become too used to violent forms of engagement. CSOs can reach out to traditional and religious leaders in order to develop peace messages grounded in sharia and local customs and integrate them into community debates. There is especially urgent need reach out to youth in order to engage them in peace-oriented activities in order to prevent joining the

⁴ *World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Security and Development* (Washington, DC: The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank), p.12

insurgency. The preventive aspect could include setting up youth empowerment centres that organize social, cultural and sports events, provide a neutral and creative place for dialogue, education, counselling.

Research and Monitoring: Early Warning and Generating Lessons Learned:

Knowledge is power and understanding the conflict context and conflict drivers is a first crucial step into identifying ways to facilitate combatant reintegration and community support for the peace process. In addition to conducting conflict mapping exercises that identify the dividers and connectors in communities as well as key conflict drivers and ways to address them, CSOs can support the JS and HPC in monitoring ongoing reintegration processes, the performance of PPCs and how they are perceived by the local population, as well as extracting lessons learned. Furthermore, CSOs can help monitor the impact of APRP on the economic, social, political, and security conditions in communities, which can also be measure of APRP success. Part of this monitoring could include the tracking of existing grievances and those that may arise during reintegration, in the form of an early warning mechanism highlighting incidents of recidivism.

4 Signatory Organizations

1. Afghan Civil Society Forum Organization (ACSFo)
2. Afghan Community Rehabilitation Unit (ACRU)
3. Afghan Development Association (ADA)
4. Afghan NGOs Coordination Body (ANCB)
5. Afghan Public Welfare Organization (APWO)
6. Afghan Women Skills Development Centre (AWSDC)
7. Afghan Women's Educational Centre (AWEC)
8. Afghan Women's Network (AWN)
9. Afghan Women's Resource Centre (AWRC)
10. Afghanistan Human Rights and Democracy Organization (AHRDO)
11. Caravan of Change
12. Centre for Conflict and Peace Studies (CAPS)
13. Civil Society Development Centre (CSDC)
14. Cooperation for Peace and Development (CPD)
15. Cooperation for Peace and Unity (CPAU)
16. Development Humanitarian Services for Afghanistan (DHSA)/The Kilid Group (TKG)
17. Equality for Peace and Democracy (EPD)
18. Foundation of Solidarity for Justice (FOSJ)
19. Media Group Afghanistan
20. Medica Afghanistan
21. Modern Organization for Development of Education (MODE)
22. Open Society Foundation Afghanistan (OSA)
23. Peace Training and Research Organization (PTRO)
24. Research Institute for Women Peace & Security – Afghanistan (RIWPS)
25. Sanayee Development Organization (SDO)
26. The Liaison Office (TLO)
27. Women and Children Legal Research Foundation (WCLRF)
28. Afghan Coalition Against Corruption (AFCAC)
29. Afghanistan Peace for Peace Organization (APPO)

30. Afghanistan Peace Development Organization (APDO)
31. Afghan Women Coordination National Coalition (AWCNC)
32. Afghan Youth in Action
33. Afghanistan Youth National and Social Organization (AYNSO)
34. Civil Society Coordination Centre (CSCC)
35. Empowerment Center for Women (ECW)
36. Free and Fair Election Foundation of Afghanistan (FEFA)
37. Ghazni Rural Support Program (GRSP)
38. Mediothek Afghanistan
39. National Union of Afghan Workers (NUAW)
40. New Afghanistan Women Association (NAWA)
41. Norwegian Project Office/Rural Rehabilitation Association for Afghanistan (NPO/RRAA)
42. Assistance for Health, Education and Development (AHEAD)
43. South West Afghanistan and Baluchistan Association for Coordination (SWABAC)
44. Organization of Charity Social and Development for Afghanistan (OCSDA)
45. Human Rights and Eradication of Violence Organization (HREVO)
46. Women Regional Network – Afghanistan
47. Education Rights and Advocacy Organization
48. Afghan Civil Society Organizations Network for Peace
49. Civil Society Activists from Herat
50. Coordinator of Faryab Women Network
51. Coordinator of Bamyan Women Network
52. Coordinator of Kandahar Women Network
53. Kandahari Khazana
54. Coordinator of Kunduz Women Network
55. Civil Activists from Bamyan
56. Representative of People's Shura from Ahmad Khan Village
57. Coordinator of Bagرامي Women Network
58. Representatives of People's Shura from Kama and Behsood Districts
59. Civil Society Empowerment Network (CEN)