The Voice of Women of Afghanistan - US Facilitated Peace Talks

We, the women of Afghanistan, have cautious optimism for end of the war that has killed our sons and daughters every day. Yet we are concerned - more than ever - that women’s human rights will be disregarded and traded away in exchange for reaching a peace deal swiftly.

A peace agreement on Afghanistan that fails to meaningfully engage women and fails promote and protect the rights of women in Afghanistan or reflect their expertise and priorities does not result in peace for women. Such an agreement will only serve to bring Afghanistan back towards the social and political exclusion women were once subjected to.

The Afghanistan of 2019 is very different to what it was two decades ago. Women play a significant role in every sector in the country, from government ministers and civil servants to entrepreneurs and private traders. Women have also actively participated in Afghanistan’s elections – both as candidates and voters. In the recent parliamentary elections, men and women from diverse areas of Afghanistan chose to vote for women candidates instead of candidates implicated in the current status quo of corruption and conflict, dispelling myths around women in decision-making roles and demonstrating how many Afghans have turned towards supporting women’s rights.

The United States Government has committed to “serving as a model for the inclusion of women in talks and negotiations concerning conflict resolution.” We call on the U.S. Government to lead by example and honor their commitments through the Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2017 by beginning to fully, equally and meaningfully engage women in the peace negotiation process.

The United States Government recognizes that women are best placed to represent their own rights, priorities and interests, as well as those of the larger community. Evidence shows that peace agreements are more likely to be secured—and are more likely to endure—when women are meaningfully involved. In the last 18 years, Afghan women have worked hard to leave behind the horrors of civil war and the brutal Taliban rule. The women of Afghanistan urge the United States Government to facilitate their full, equal and meaningful participation in peace talks, in recognition that Afghan women are best placed to represent their priorities.

For peace to last and be sustainable, women must be included in peace talks and their rights must be expressly reflected in any agreement.

The circumstances that lead to the 1992 civil war are increasingly mirrored by the circumstances of today. Should an interim government replace the elected government, confidence in Afghanistan’s fragile democratic processes and institutions, as well as the political order will be undermined. The sacrifices that Afghan women and men have made in the hope for sustaining democracy will be lost. Therefore, we further encourage the U.S. Government to listen to and involve Afghans, including Afghan women, in its plans for withdrawal of forces related to a peace agreement.

We thank the United States Government for its continued support. We insist on the presence and full, equal and meaningful participation of women in the peace talks for Afghanistan, so that women’s concerns and solutions will be raised and included in all decisions on equal ground and their rights respected, protected and fulfilled. The legitimacy and sustainability of peace depends on the full, equal and meaningful participation of women.

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1 United States National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325, Outcome 2.1 (June 2016).