

Afghan Women's Leaders' Priorities for Stabilization

Statement and Recommendations

January 27, 2010

We, Afghan women leaders and representatives of women's civil society organizations, concerned about the absence of women's perspectives on proposals being discussed at The London Conference on Afghanistan have created recommendations for stabilization that bear in mind the obligation to consult women and address their priorities and needs.

Afghan women are the first to benefit from stability and pay the heaviest price for the resurgence in violence. Sustainable peace will not be achieved without women's full participation. They are mobilized as never before to protect the gains they have made with the help of the international community since 2001 and to contribute to the peace process by promoting security and good governance grounded in respect for human rights and equality. We call for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and related resolutions calling for women's full participation in peace building as part of all initiatives to accelerate conflict resolution and recovery in the country.

The following recommendations were developed during an extensive consultative process with Afghan women leaders in Kabul, followed by Dubai on January 24th and London on January 26th to feed directly into the topics for discussion at the Ministerial meeting on January 28th.¹

I Security

Fundamental to progress in Afghanistan is enhanced security on the ground. But achieving true security will require more than military stabilization; it will require women's freedom of movement and access to basic services—police protection, justice, health care, education, and clean water. Additionally, it will necessitate social change in private as well as public life; rampant domestic violence and other abuses of women's rights exacerbated by conflict are major contributors to women's insecurity. Women experience instability differently from men; they therefore have specific perspectives on how to achieve security for all Afghan citizens. To fully engage all Afghans in efforts to create a secure environment, we recommend that:

1. **Women must be represented in all peace processes.** Consistent with constitutional guarantees for women's representation, women must comprise *at least 25%* of any peace process including any proposed upcoming peace jirgas. They must be represented in any national and local security policy making forums, such as the Afghan President's National Security Council.
2. **Reconciliation guarantee women's rights.** The government and international community must secure and monitor women's rights in all reconciliation initiatives so that the status of women is not bargained away in any short-term effort to achieve stability.
3. **Security policy must protect women.** All efforts to enhance security in Afghanistan must better serve women. This can be achieved by:
 - a. training national and international security personnel regarding Afghan laws and in particular the Elimination of Violence against Women law;
 - b. recruiting women to security services, especially national police, UNPOL, international peacekeepers, civilian and military staff of PRTs; and

¹ The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and The Institute for Inclusive Security facilitated discussions.

- c. expanding the number of Family Response Units in local police districts to enable more culturally sensitive and responsive engagement with women.

II Governance and Development

Investment to expand women's engagement and effectiveness in public decision-making, in electoral politics, public administration, and in civil society help to deepen democracy, tackle corruption, increase the legitimacy of government, and concentrate the focus of public sector management on providing basic services. To strengthen women's leadership skills and to promote gender-responsive public sector performance we recommend that:

1. **National gender equality policies be implemented.** International donors should make aid contingent on accelerated implementation of existing policies for the advancement of women in Afghanistan, especially the National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan, and the cross-cutting gender component of the Afghan National Development Strategy.
2. **Governance reforms advance gender equality.** Good governance reforms should advance gender equality and the capacity of public services to respond to women's needs by:
 - a. upgrading to senior management gender focal points in all national institutions and strengthening the gender units;
 - b. extending current quotas to all branches and levels of elected and appointed government;
 - c. supporting special measures to help women overcome obstacles to effective political competition (e.g.: measures to prevent political violence against women, measures to overcome access barriers to public debate, training, and resources);
 - d. enforcing the 30% quota to civil service positions at all levels;
 - e. strengthening of the Ministry of Women's Affairs and ensuring it participates in all decision-making clusters to ensure attention to gender and women's needs.
3. **Aid should be tracked for women's rights.** All aid should be monitored to track its effectiveness in promoting women's rights and gender equality. Donors should ensure that a minimum of 25% of funds are dedicated specifically to achieve gender parity. Financing for Afghan women's organizations should increase to strengthen women's implementation of the development agenda and civil society participation in reconstruction.
4. **Women's access to justice be enhanced.** Traditional dispute resolution systems have historically been gender biased. Resources must be invested in expansion of the formal justice system to give women access to justice and ensure that all judicial mechanisms comply with the constitution of Afghanistan, women's rights under Islam and international standards.

III Regional Frameworks/International Architecture

We commend the regional cooperative forums focused on trade, refugees, and drug trafficking for their efforts to involve women. As regional mechanisms are developed to address cross-border security challenges, we advise that:

1. **Women's regional peace coalitions be engaged for dialogue.** Any regional efforts should engage women and leverage the relationships they have built through existing networks.
2. **Women be involved in creating new regional mechanisms.** Women should help design any new approaches to and structures for stabilization and reconstruction in Afghanistan as well as efforts to create regional forums for cooperation. Any such processes and structures should engage women at all levels of decision-making and should implement UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and related resolutions calling for women's participation in conflict resolution, prevention of violence, and protection of vulnerable groups.
3. **Regional forums be used to stop human trafficking.**