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**Topic: Inclusive and Sustainable Peace in Afghanistan**

**Date: Monday, March 16, 2020**

**Background**

After the collapse of the Taliban regime and formation of a new government in Afghanistan with the support of the international community, women found the opportunity to take part in governance and building institutions, exercise their rights to education and free expression, and access opportunities in the workplace. One of the most important gains of the last 19 years is in the area of women's rights, enabling women to raise their voices, advocate for their interests and work beside men for the reconstruction of their homeland. Since the United States of America and the Taliban signed a peace deal in February, concerns have been raised by people from different segments of Afghan society, especially women. The Taliban has historically repressed women in Afghanistan, and thus the US-Taliban deal could have a negative impact on women's rights. The women of Afghanistan want to participate meaningfully in the peace process and represent themselves, especially during the upcoming intra-Afghan dialogues. This position paper articulates the position of Provincial Women's Network (PWN) members (women mostly from rural areas from 38 districts) across 15 provinces of Afghanistan on achieving an inclusive and sustainable peace in Afghanistan, focusing on six priority areas.

**I. Inclusiveness**

An inclusive peace process can lead to sustainable peace and elimination of violence. Indeed, peace is better achieved when different groups are able to reflect the diverse interests, needs and positions of all social groups, including women, youth and civil society.

It is not sufficient for the peace process to include only armed actors, political party representatives, and token unrepresentative women. We demand meaningful representation of women, youth, and other segments of society within the dialogue process, whether through direct representation at the negotiating table or the creation of specialized advisory committees.

The Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GoIRA) and international community must ensure that the voices of women, youth and civil society organizations are not only heard but also truly reflected in the final agreement between the GoIRA and the Taliban.

**II. Reduction of Violence and Ceasefire**

The GoIRA and Taliban must reduce violence immediately and agree on a comprehensive ceasefire during intra-Afghan dialogue. To build public trust and confidence in the dialogue process, parties to the conflict should make a firm and public commitment to stop using violence as a negotiating strategy.

The continuation of current protracted conflict will not only be an obstacle to making peace, but will also harm the aspirations of all Afghans for a peaceful future. When we talk of violence, what do we mean by it? Violence must be clearly described and identified. Whether it is the ongoing conflict between Afghan troops and Taliban, or inhuman decisions taken by the Taliban (like stoning women to death), we demand the elimination of all forms of violence.

**III. Preservation of Values and Structures**

Afghanistan's constitution is one of the finest constitutions in the region, where the rights of all people are considered. In the last 19 years, there have been important achievements in relation to respect for human rights, freedom of speech, fair elections, and women's rights.

ent institutions to ensure that nothing is against Islam in the established  
re of governmental institutions and a good example could be the changes  
eir visits from different cities during the three-day Eid ceasefire last year.  
s, a group of experts in Islamic studies, law and political science should be  
formed to critically discuss with the Taliban over those articles which the Taliban considers to be in conflict with Islamic  
norms.

The peace process should be Afghan-owned and Afghan-led, and for this a national consensus must be made where different  
groups agree on certain principles for dialogue with the Taliban. The Taliban must also make sure that no other countries  
influence the process behind the scenes.

Moreover, the current ongoing political crisis, with parallel governments inaugurated last week, must be resolved.

#### **IV. Role of International Community in the Peace Process**

We ask the international community to provide institutional, financial and moral support to enable Afghans to have a  
transparent, inclusive and sustainable Afghan-led, Afghan-owned peace process.

Afghanistan as a developing country, and as such still needs foreign aid, technical assistance and political support from the  
international community. Years of war have left us lagging behind, and beset by major problems like infrastructural damage,  
illiteracy, poverty, and mass unemployment. Therefore, the financial support of the international community for the  
reconstruction of a post-conflict country like Afghanistan is crucial for political, economic and educational development.  
Furthermore, the political and financial support for women must continue to ensure that they are not ignored again, and that  
their rights will be preserved.

The presence of guarantor/s is necessary for the peace process to succeed. The guarantors can be US, European Union (EU),  
United Nations (UN) and other influential countries.

The international community, including the US, stated that they do not want Afghanistan to have an Islamic Emirate form of  
state. We support this statement and emphasize preserving the Islamic Republic form of state for Afghanistan, which is the  
best option for the diverse communities of Afghanistan.

The withdrawal of US troops must be based on the agreements and developments in intra-Afghan dialogue. For instance, the  
intra-Afghan dialogue was scheduled to start on March 10, 2020, but due to the issue of release of prisoners it did not start.  
At the same time, the US has already started withdrawal of its troops. Any step toward withdrawal taken in a rush could  
waste decades' worth of effort by the international community. We request the US and international military forces to ensure  
that by the time they withdraw from this country, the resulting situation does not threaten the lives and fundamental human  
rights of millions of Afghans for which the international community has worked for the past two decades.

#### **V. Next Steps in the Peace Process**

An inclusive shura of influential leaders and representatives of different groups must be formed to lead the peace process.  
This shura can also discuss the release of prisoners and trust-building initiatives.

The GoIRA and international community should make sure that negotiators from the Taliban side are inclusive and represent  
all parties within the Taliban movement.

The peace process must be dealt with fairly and in a spirit of equality. If the GoIRA takes a step towards peace, the Taliban  
must also take a step, thus building trust with each other. The release of prisoners by both sides must take place cautiously.  
There must be proper guarantee that Taliban fighters released will not return to the battlefield, and consequences for  
impeachment of the agreement must be clear. The GOIRA should initially only release those fighters with less severe criminal  
records compared to others. The foreign fighters included in the list of prisoners must be visible to the nation and their  
relevant countries must be held accountable for their linkages with the Taliban.