

National Civil Society and Media Conference on Peace Negotiations

Intercontinental Hotel, Kabul, 2 April 2019

On 2 April 2019, **400 Afghan men and women (young and old) from across Afghanistan** gathered at the Intercontinental Hotel in Kabul Afghanistan and had a lengthy and serious discussion about the peace process in Afghanistan. The impetus for the gathering was concern that despite ongoing peace talks among many parties (including the Government of Afghanistan, neighbouring countries, regional powers, super powers and the Taliban), the interests, voices, concerns, and positions of ordinary Afghans have not yet been heard; nor have Afghan citizens been included in closed door peace negotiations.

During the conference, participants were divided into 12 working groups each covering several topics of importance to the Afghan people. These included:

- Presidential Elections
- Ongoing Peace Negotiations
- Role and responsibility of High Peace Council
- Comprehensive and inclusivity in Peace negotiations
- Political Order
- Victims of War & their families
- Civilian casualties and ceasefire
- Pre-conditions for peace negotiations
- Afghanistan's Constitution
- Freedom of Speech and Media
- Guarantors of Peace agreement
- Roles of the international community during peace negotiations

These discussions resulted in a Joint-Declaration of common concerns, with more detailed outcomes of specific working groups being shared at a later point in time.

19-Point Joint Declaration of Afghan Civil Society and Media on the Afghan Peace Negotiations

We, the 400 participants from across Afghanistan of the 2 April 2019 National Civil Society and Media Conference on Peace Negotiations, declare our position on the current peace negotiations:

1. The 2004 Afghanistan Constitution should not be amended until a peace deal is reached. If a peace deal stipulates amendments to the Afghan Constitution, they should be based on the mechanism laid down in the constitution.
2. Modifications to the current governance structure of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan should not be the price of a peace deal.

3. Presidential elections shall be held within the time-frame set by the Independent Election Commission of Afghanistan. If the Taliban agrees to be part of the elections, an equal amount of election facilities (such as voting sites) should be assigned to both government as well as Taliban-controlled areas, with the Afghan government and the Taliban ensuring the safety of voters in their areas of control.
4. We do not consider the formation of an interim government as a good solution for reaching peace, for following reasons:
 - a. It is against the Afghan Constitution.
 - b. It does not provide a guarantee that presidential elections will be conducted successfully.
 - c. It does not provide assurance that countrywide security will be maintained.
5. The Afghan government and the Taliban shall announce an immediate ceasefire until a peace deal is reached in order to
 - a. Prevent further civilian casualties;
 - b. Prevent further deterioration of the security situation;
 - c. Create an environment of trust for peace negotiations.
6. Until the announcement of a ceasefire, all parties to the conflict shall refrain from launching rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) to prevent further civilian casualties.
7. The Taliban shall cut all their ties with terrorist groups immediately and agree to disarm their troops after a peace agreement is reached.
8. Both parties to the conflict should draw on competent negotiators with a good reputation, character and morality from within Afghan civil society.
9. Any Afghan citizen participating in peace negotiations with the Taliban shall take into consideration the interests of the Afghan public, including all rights enshrined in the 2004 Afghan constitution. They should build upon the achievements made in the past 18 years and never take decisions against the will and interests of ordinary Afghans (many of which we have outlined here).
10. Afghan women should be included into all peace negotiations and implementations of peace agreements. The right of Afghan women to participate in Afghan society, economy and politics (all three branches of the state) is essential for sustainable peace and thus should be guaranteed in any peace agreement reached.
11. Peace negotiations must be inclusive and involve all segments of Afghan society such as women, youth, religious scholars, war victims, martyred families, tribal elders, all ethnic groups and religious minorities. Reflecting the reality of Afghan society, women shall comprise 40 to 50 percent of any peace negotiation team.
12. The role of women journalists shall not be compromised in peace negotiations.
13. Freedom of speech and free media is the greatest achievement of the last 18 years and thus should not be compromised. Clear guarantees from all parties to the conflict

should be provided for the protection and support of freedom of speech and free media.

14. Access to information is the fundamental right of the people. This right shall be protected by the Afghan government and Taliban during and after peace negotiations
15. The role of external countries in the Afghan peace process (especially neighbouring countries and the United States of America) must be made transparent.
16. Countries involved in the peace process of Afghanistan should provide proper mechanism and guarantee for the peace process.
17. None of the countries can be sole guarantors of peace. The role of countries involved in the future of Afghanistan must be transparent.
18. External entities (such as the United Nations (UN), European Union (EU), Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), ECHO) should engage as facilitators in the peace process and encourage their members-states to do the same.
19. The role of the High Peace Council in the peace process is unclear and should either be defined properly or the High Peace Council shall be dissolved.

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