



Kabul, Afghanistan, 12 October 2014

## **OPEN LETTER**

### **The Afghan People's 10-Point Road Map for Peace**

To: His Excellency, President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai

Excellency,

We, on behalf of the biggest networks of Afghan civil society, congratulate you on your inauguration as President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. We were pleased to note the prominence you gave in your inaugural address to good governance, human rights and women's empowerment, as well as the need to tackle widespread corruption while ensuring equitable development. We view Afghanistan's Government of National Unity as the ultimate vehicle to protect and promote the socio-political rights of all Afghans and, accordingly, share and support your vision of securing the rights of all Afghan men and women as the basis for building a peaceful, stable and prosperous Afghanistan.

Your Excellency, based on your request from Afghan citizens for their prioritisation of social challenges that the Government of National Unity should address, we wish to share with you the key findings of a rights-based initiative we have facilitated over the past three years: the *Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace*. This initiative was conceived to promote an inclusive, Afghan-led peace process that puts ordinary Afghans at the heart of any effort to secure lasting peace in Afghanistan, while at the same time enabling us, as Afghan civil society activists, to amplify the voices of ordinary Afghans and ensure they are heard by all policymakers, including the ultimate policymakers – the leaders of our county.

To date, over 6,000 ordinary Afghan citizens - men, women and youth (including housewives, local business people, teachers, farmers, persons with disabilities, students, community elders and religious leaders, and former members of the armed opposition) have taken part in the Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace through inclusive focus groups discussions in all 34 provinces, including remote, rural areas. Our efforts concentrated on soliciting ordinary people's views on the key drivers of the on-going conflict as well as corresponding, workable solutions. The findings of the second phase of the Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace were published in the form of a summary report launched in June 2014, entitled *Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace: Building the Foundations for an Inclusive Peace Process*, and included a **10-Point Road Map for Peace**.

The initiative has also resulted, to date, in the production of 30 draft provincial-level road maps for peace. The findings and solutions proposed in these road maps for peace serve as both a call to action and a demand that all peace building efforts meaningfully involve Afghan men, women and youth from all parts of society. Such an inclusive process will not only guarantee the legitimacy of any peace building effort, but also, critically, lead to durable peace based on the will of the Afghan people, thereby giving people a stake in the future development of their country.

The Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace highlighted that Afghan men, women and youth view disarming and disempowering local militias, tackling widespread corruption and impunity, particularly among the police and judiciary, resolving ethnic tensions, tribal disputes and factional conflicts, which fuel broader armed conflict, respecting human rights and providing equitable development assistance and service delivery across the country, as the essential components of any strategy to achieve lasting peace in Afghanistan.

The most common theme echoed throughout the Afghan's People's Dialogue on Peace, and detailed in the summary report, is Afghans' discontent with the Government due to corruption, weak rule of law and pervasive impunity for human rights violations and impunity. These factors were viewed as the main drivers of the armed conflict in Afghanistan. The report highlights that corruption offers a 'path to influence' and impunity is a direct by-product of corruption in the justice system. Your Excellency's early focus on reviewing the Kabul Bank case and reforming the judicial system is a welcome development; we look forward to being consulted on and receiving regular updates on this process.

Afghans strongly called for the implementation of reform programmes, including independent and non-political measures to remove corrupt officials, merit-based appointments of local government employees, and the introduction of more efficient administrative procedures. People also called on the Government to ensure public scrutiny of key justice sector personnel, and to implement changes aimed at combatting corruption and abuse of authority in the police, prosecutor's offices and courts.

The Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace further pointed to a lack of Government presence in remote, insecure and contested areas as a key driver of the armed conflict. People noted that the Government's inability to maintain sufficient levels of national security forces in many parts of the country has contributed to the resurgence of the Taliban and other abusive illegal armed groups in provinces such as Farah, Herat, Jawzjan and Parwan.

Afghans who live in insecure parts of the country stressed that fear stemming from Taliban infiltration and inadequate levels of national security forces led the previous Government to outsource the security of its citizens to notorious local militiamen. This, according to people in Kunduz province, has created "*States within the State*" where 'law' is administered locally according to the whim of warlords rather than by provincial or national structures. Afghans accordingly call on the Government of National Unity to disarm illegal armed groups and other so-called pro-Government militias. The people view this measure as critical to tackling the illegitimate influence of local powerbrokers and warlords over local government institutions.

Afghan men, women and youth also expressed grave concerns about deepening ethnic, tribal and factional animosity that drives insecurity and instability in many parts of Afghanistan. People stated that such conflicts carry the potential to and often have fuelled the broader conflict between the Government and the armed opposition. Afghans called on the Government of National Unity to focus more attention on resolving local-level conflicts and disputes and stem growing conflict by promoting community cohesion and reconciliation, which would assist in ensuring an inclusive peace process.

The report identifies lack of economic progress and social justice as a serious driver of instability. Poverty, slow and unequal development in all regions, along with mass unemployment, and inequality in the allocation of resources are problems that participants in the Afghan People's Dialogue believe the Government has failed to address over the past 12 years.

Afghans also raised serious concerns about the misuse, misappropriation and inequitable distribution of development assistance. People noted that lack of community infrastructure and services such as roads, bridges, schools and healthcare facilities continued not only to undermine stable governance but also

resulted in enormous hardship and suffering among poor Afghans. We believe that your agenda, as articulated in your inaugural speech, where you state that the Government of National Unity has “a commitment to directly transfer the national budget to the provinces” can serve a basis to resolve these problems.

Focusing on unemployment, and in particular increasingly disenfranchised youth, who can pose security challenges, the Afghan People’s Dialogue on Peace found that ‘education is the key to security’. Emphasis on the plight of Afghan youth, along with employment and income generation initiatives were thus viewed by Afghans as an immediate and national priority for the Government of National Unity.

Opium poppy cultivation and the struggle for control over its illicit economy as directly linked to high rates of unemployment, corruption within government institutions, illiteracy, youth’s susceptibility to drugs and the influence of armed groups over youth are fundamental problems identified by the people. Afghans therefore called on the Government of National Unity to focus more proactively on fostering job creation, investing in alternative crops, and emphasising the development of education facilities and services for youth as ways to combat the drugs problem.

As also highlighted in the summary report, Afghans emphatically viewed the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme (APRP) as a failed programme. They expressed resentment at their exclusion from both the process around the implementation of the Programme, as well as the lack of broader community-based development envisaged at the Programme’s conception. In the report, Afghans expressed the view that the APRP is led by those who have a vested interest in continuation of the conflict. Former Taliban fighters who had been reintegrated through the APRP also voiced dissatisfaction with the Programme.

The report highlights that Afghans are calling for an inclusive peace process to ensure that peace is based on the legitimate desires and will of all Afghan people and not just elites and powerbrokers. People are calling on the Government of National Unity to fundamentally reform the APRP in a way that gives all people a stake in building the foundations for lasting peace at the local-level.

The report, summarising the views of Afghan men, women and youth is enclosed with this letter. We hope it will support and further enhance Your Excellency’s vision for building lasting peace in Afghanistan – based on the legitimate grievances, desires and will of the Afghan people. We also enclose the **People’s 10-Point Road Map for Peace**. The main message of the report is that durable peace can only be achieved by addressing the root causes of the conflict that has plagued our country for years, based on the solutions identified by the people; only then will the conflict be meaningfully resolved.

We look forward to meeting with Your Excellency to further discuss the findings of the Afghan People’s Dialogue on Peace and how Afghan civil society can play a role in securing peace as a reliable bridge between people and the Government.

Yours sincerely,

Steering Committee members of the Afghan People’s Dialogue on Peace

*Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC)*  
*Afghan Civil Society Forum (ASCF)*  
*Afghan Civil Society & Human Rights Network (ACSHRN)*  
*Afghan National Union of Labour (AMCA)*  
*Afghan Women’s Network (AWN)*

*Afghan Women Skills Development Centre (AWSDC)*  
*Human Rights Focus Organization (HRFO)*  
*Organization for Social Development and Legal Rights - Afghanistan (OSDLR)*  
*Sanayee Development Organization (SDO)*  
*Transitional Justice Coordinating Group (TJCG)*  
*Women Political Participation Committee (WPPC)*

Cc: His Excellency Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, Chief Executive of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan