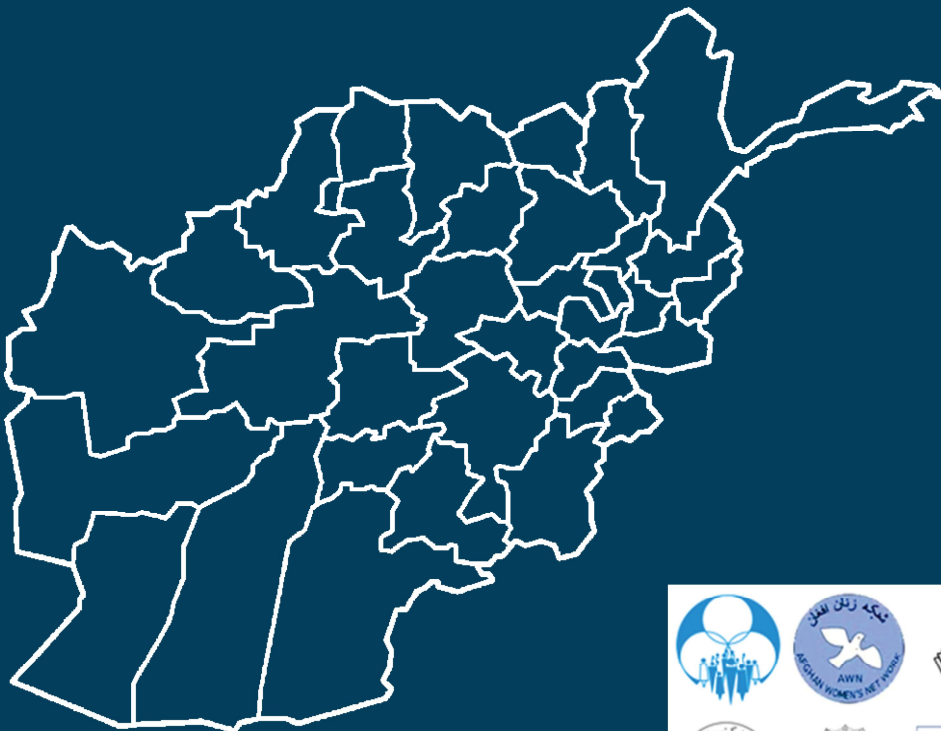


AFGHAN PEOPLE'S DIALOGUE ON PEACE

BUILDING THE FOUNDATIONS FOR AN INCLUSIVE PEACE PROCESS

— *Local Road Maps for Peace* —



★ KABUL, AFGHANISTAN | JUNE 2014



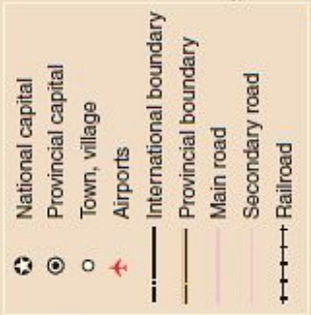
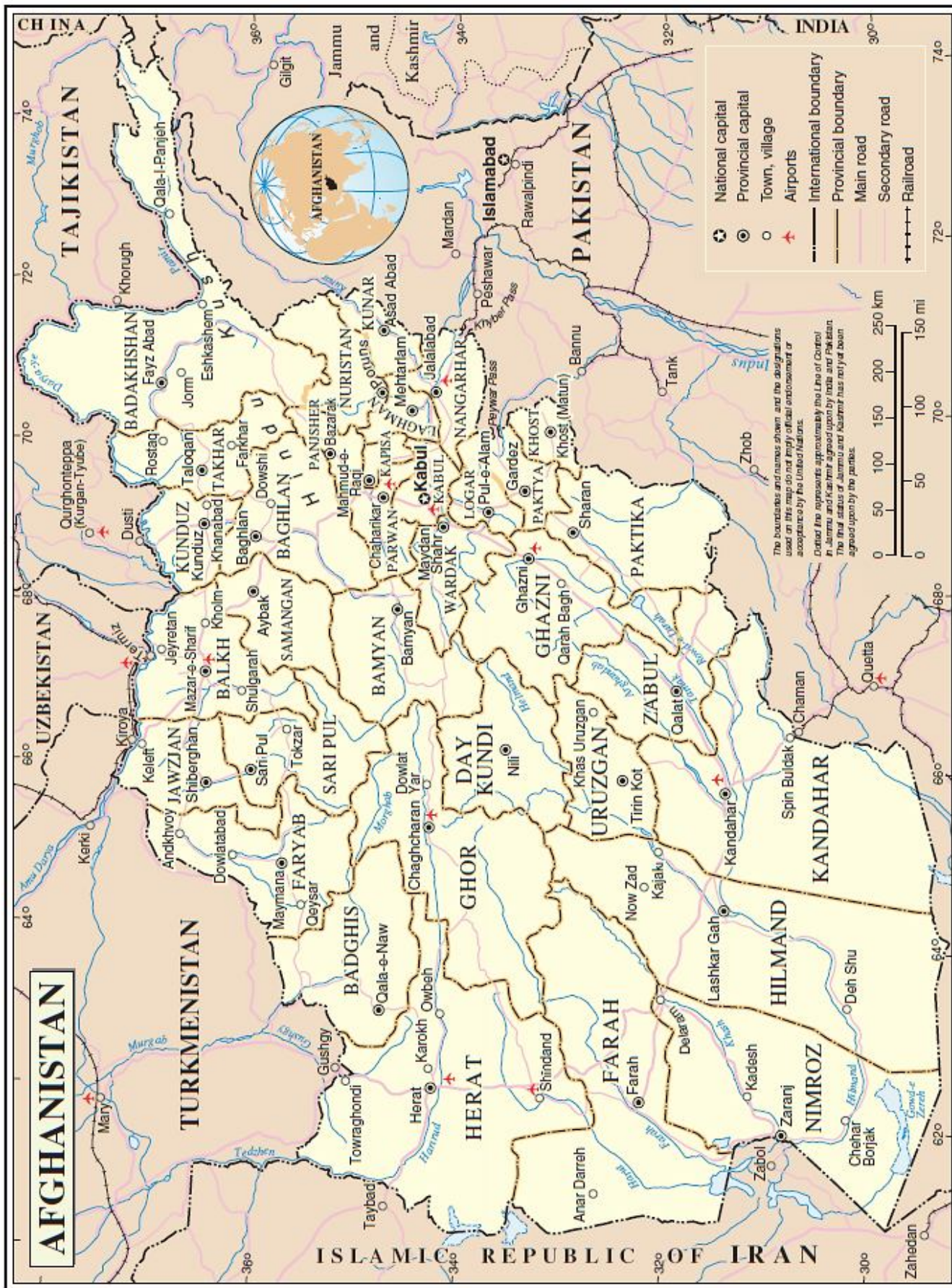
“Afghan people welcome initiatives such as the Afghan People’s Dialogue on Peace as they are crucial for enhancing people’s role in the peace process and serve as a significant forum in which ordinary people can freely express their views about peace and conflict in their province. These people-centred, grassroots efforts are critical for the creation of a national consensus for peace.”

– Participant in focus group discussion, Uruzgan province

Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace: Building the Foundations for an Inclusive Peace Process

Local Road Maps for Peace

**Kabul, Afghanistan
10 June 2014**



The boundaries and names shown on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

Coast line approximates the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties.



Afghan People’s Dialogue on Peace: Building the Foundations for an Inclusive Peace Process

Local Road Maps for Peace

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The views expressed in this document are solely those of the Afghan men, women and youth who participated in phase II of the Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace.

Executive Summary

Disarming and disempowering local militias, tackling widespread corruption and impunity 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 are essential to achieving lasting peace in Afghanistan, found the Afghan civil society-led initiative, Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace.

Prepared by 11 Afghan civil society networks and the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, the 40-page report, *Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace: Building the Foundations for an Inclusive Peace Process*, summarises the views of 4,648 Afghan men, women and youth from all 34 provinces of the country, documents their grievances and aspirations, and presents their solutions to achieve durable peace in Afghanistan.

Designed to promote inclusivity and give voice to the views of ordinary Afghans on critical issues that impact their lives most, the Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace enabled Afghan civil society groups to solicit the views of the traditionally marginalised, including Afghans in rural and remote areas of the country as well as women and youth, and present these views to the two leading presidential candidates as the legitimate aims and desires of the people.

Based on 189 focus group discussions, opinion surveys and individuals interviews, conducted by Afghan civil society between April 2013 and January 2014, which included housewives, local business people, teachers, farmers, students, community elders and religious leaders, youth, and former members of the armed opposition (ex-Taliban), the report reflects the involvement and views of Afghan men, women and youth from all walks of life on prospects for peace at the local level across Afghanistan. Discussions with communities led to the creation, to date, of 30 provincial road maps for peace.

The report represents the findings of phase II of the Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace. Phase I of the People's Dialogue comprised 78 focus group discussions held in 31 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces, and involved 1,526 Afghan men, women and youth from diverse ethnic groups and socioeconomic backgrounds. The findings of phase I were published in a comprehensive report issued in December 2011, entitled *Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace, Laying the Foundations for an Inclusive Peace Process*. During both phases, over 6,000 Afghan men, women and youth have taken part in the Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace.

Acting as representatives of the people, Afghan civil society compiled the report summarising the findings of phase II of the Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace to ensure that the voices of ordinary Afghan people are amplified and heard by policymakers, including the ultimate policymaker in the country, the incoming president of Afghanistan. The report is a call to action to ensure that all peacebuilding initiatives not only meaningfully involve Afghan men, women and youth but are based on the road maps for peace Afghans themselves have envisaged for their country. This will not only guarantee the legitimacy of any peace process, but, critically, lead to sustainable peace based on the will of the Afghan people.

Tackle widespread corruption

A common theme echoed throughout the Afghan People's Dialogue and detailed in the report is Afghans' discontent with their Government due to corruption, weak rule of law and pervasive impunity for human rights violations. These factors were viewed as the main drivers of the armed conflict. The report noted that corruption offers a 'path to influence' and that impunity is a direct by-product of corruption in the justice system.

"The corrupt Government is discriminating among the many Afghan ethnicities, and there is no merit-based system for recruitment of officials. Systematic human rights violations are on-going, and the resultant poverty and culture of impunity are causing local disputes," said Dialogue participants in Daikundi province. Similar views were echoed by many Afghans across the country.

Afghan men, women and youth reinforced the need to strengthen checks and balances aimed at improving oversight of local government institutions. The report found that Afghans seek accountable, transparent and efficient local government which they view as central to ensuring durable peace. People strongly called for 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.

In the report, Afghans 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.

Improve security and disarm and disempower local militias

The Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace pointed to a lack of Government presence in remote, insecure and contested areas as a key driver of the armed conflict. The report noted that the Government's inability to maintain sufficient levels of national security forces in many parts of the country was viewed as contributing 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 has led the 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 rather than at the provincial or national-level.

"Illegal armed people exist all over. They do not want peace because they would lose power. Therefore they generate conflict among the communities. This is the unfortunate reality and the true limitation for peace in our communities. Until these groups are expelled, peace remains a dream," said a community elder from Parwan province.

The report called on the Government to disarm illegal armed groups and other pro-Government militias. Afghans view this as critical to tackling the illegitimate influence of local powerbrokers and warlords over local government institutions.

Address local factional disputes and links to the insurgency

The report expressed Afghan men, women and youth's grave concerns about deepening ethnic, tribal and factional animosity that drives insecurity and instability in many parts of Afghanistan. People stated that such conflicts carried the potential to and often had fuelled the broader conflict between the

Government and the armed opposition – with each party desperate to build alliances, consolidate their powerbase, accumulate arms and mobilise forces to undermine their rivals.

“In our district, the major cause of conflict is long-standing factional animosity and fighting. This has divided our people: some joined pro-Government militias and others are connected with the Taliban. There has been severe fighting and many people have been killed or injured as a result,” said Afghans from Balkh province.

Countrywide, Afghans stated that factional allegiances remained a serious dividing force. At the community level, such disputes have often flared into a full-scale Taliban-led insurgency. Afghans called on the Government to focus more attention on resolving local-level conflicts and disputes and stem growing conflict by promoting community cohesion and reconciliation, and ensuring an inclusive peace process.

Promote equitable development across Afghanistan, prioritise education, and empower Afghan youth

The report identifies lack of economic progress and social justice as a huge driver of instability. Poverty, slow and unequal development in all regions, along with mass unemployment, and inequality in the allocation of resources are problems the Government has failed to address over the last 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.

Focusing on unemployment, and in particular increasingly disenfranchised youth, the report found that ‘education is the key to security’. As a defence lawyer in Laghman province stated, *“youth are raw material for the on-going conflict. Most youth are jobless . . . so they are easily recruited.”*

Emphasis on the plight of Afghan youth, along with employment and income generation initiatives were viewed by Afghans as an immediate and national priority for any incoming government. *“We have a common maxim that the mind of an unemployed person is the nursery of Satan. The crux of the problem is unemployment, and unemployment is the main reason that people, especially unemployed youth, join the insurgency,”* explained a community elder from Aliabad district in Kunduz province.

A member of a local council in Helmand province asserted that people’s frustration and willingness to resort to violence are fuelled by a lack of basic services, stating: *“low quality of education, joblessness, lack of fundamental services, such as electricity and water for agricultural activities, and lack of good governance drive the conflict.”* The report found that similar sentiments were voiced in discussions throughout the country.

Afghan men, women and youth countrywide also saw opium poppy cultivation and the struggle for control over the illicit economy as directly linked to high rates of unemployment and lack of economic opportunity, corruption within Government institutions, illiteracy, youth’s susceptibility to drugs and the influence of armed groups over vulnerable youth and destitute farmers.

People called on the Government to focus more proactively on fostering job creation, investing in alternative crops such as cotton, and emphasising the development of education facilities for youth as ways to combat the drugs problem.

Promote an inclusive peace process and reform the Afghan Peace and Reintegration Programme

The report highlights people's frustration with the peace process; the views of ordinary people, those who have to live with the outcome of any settlement, have been ignored and Afghans questioned the legitimacy of persons involved in the peace process.

"I do not believe in the current peace process, as it is led by people who have been part of the conflict in the past. They have a lot to lose if peace arrives." This view of a former Jihadi commander in Balkh province was expressed by many Afghan men, women and youth involved in the People's Dialogue. Afghans stressed that the current actors running the peace process cannot meaningfully contribute to the peace process.

The report also found that Afghans emphatically view the Government's Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme (APRP) as a failure. Afghans 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, stating that it failed to deliver on its promises and left them feeling used, unsupported in the long-run, and vulnerable to attack by the Taliban for their cooperation with the Government.

Overall, Afghans stressed that those currently involved in the peace process are unable to achieve lasting peace as they do not represent and reflect the views and voices of ordinary people as many have an interest in the continuation of conflict.

Afghan men, women and youth called 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 also called on the Government to fundamentally reform the APRP to give ordinary Afghans a stake in building the foundations for real peace at the local-level.

Protect and promote human rights and women's rights

Throughout the People's Dialogue, Afghans asserted that proactive and concerted efforts to promote and protect human rights, enhance rule of law, and tackle impunity should be the basic goals of the Government, civil society and the international community. Most Dialogue participants who spoke on human rights advocated for an increase in the number and quality of human rights awareness programmes to familiarise society with human and women's rights which would be viewed by all as compatible with Afghan society and culture.

Only when all these root causes of the conflict that have plagued Afghanistan for years are meaningfully addressed – based on the solutions identified in the road maps for peace envisioned by the people – will real peace and stability be achieved in Afghanistan.

The Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace contains 33 recommendations to the Government of Afghanistan, the armed opposition, the international community and Afghan civil society on steps needed to achieve lasting peace in Afghanistan. The recommendations of the 4,648 Afghan men, women and youth involved in (phase II) of the Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace have been expanded into provincial road maps for peace. Thirty (30) road maps have been completed to date.

Afghan men, women and youth nationwide urged national and international policymakers at all levels to promptly and adequately address the root-causes of conflict and promote sustainable peace through focus on the following 10 identified priorities:

Afghan People's 10-Point Road Map for Peace

i) Promote Responsive State Institutions

- Rampant corruption within local government institutions (police, prosecution departments and judiciary) and parliament requires stronger checks and balances to improve oversight of these institutions.
- Reform programmes need to be implemented, including independent and non-political measures to remove corrupt Government officials, enhanced training and capacity building initiatives for local government employees, ensuring transparent and merit-based appointments of local government employees with priority given to eligible candidates from provinces where the post is located, and introducing more efficient administrative procedures.
- A performance-based system should be introduced with rewards (*makafat*) and punishments (*majaza*) that would recognise well-performing officials and reprimand those engaged in corruption.

ii) Strengthen Security Institutions

- The Government's limited reach was viewed as a main factor in the Government's lack of authority over territory and its inability to peacefully manage local conflicts. Afghans in general acknowledged progress on reforming and strengthening the Afghan national security forces (ANSF) and reported a high-level of confidence in the Afghan National Army. Afghans repeatedly raised serious complaints, however, about criminal and abusive behaviour, including gross violations of human rights, by the Afghan National Police, Afghan Local Police and pro-Government militias.
- To build effective, responsive and democratic security forces, the People's Dialogue proposed establishing and expanding the functions of security institutions.
- Afghans asserted the need for continued international support to professionalize and build a community-responsive ANSF, and stressed the need for continuous support and cooperation in equipping and training the ANSF to strengthen ANSF capacity which was viewed as vital to maintaining security after withdrawal of international military forces at the end of 2014.
- To build confidence in the ANSF, people proposed the establishment of an effective oversight mechanism with local communities empowered and enabled to report human rights violations by the ANSF with unlawful actions investigated and punished.

iii) Disarm and Disempower Illegal Armed Groups and Other Pro-Government Militias

- Afghans emphasised the imperative to end the illegitimate influence of local powerbrokers and warlords over local government institutions. This action, people asserted, would in turn strengthen peace and stability at the district-level. Afghans throughout the country strongly sought re-introduction of the Disarmament of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG) programme, launched by the Government in June 2005 and ended in March 2011.

- Afghans stressed that opium poppy cultivation, drugs smuggling and illegal extortions by drug-traffickers have sustained or exacerbated the conflict in many areas. People stated that revenues generated from cultivation, processing, and trafficking of opium poppy, as well as drug addiction, directly benefitted insurgent groups and local militias. People blamed these groups for contributing in a direct way to further destabilisation and insecurity in remote areas where the illicit economy thrives.
- Afghans called on the Government to prioritise eradication of the illicit drugs trade and the revenues it generates by strategically locating Afghan national security forces in areas where the drugs trade flourishes to curb insurgent activities and disempower illegal armed groups.

iv) Promote Human Rights, Rule of Law and Tackling Impunity

- Afghans strongly advocated that the Government and international community should take practical steps to ensure the safety and security of civilians during armed counterinsurgency operations and protect their basic human rights in that context. Afghans were very vocal in their desire for stronger rule of law, transparent, accountable and efficient State institutions, and an end to Afghanistan's legacy of impunity.
- The overwhelming majority of Afghans involved in the People's Dialogue suggested that reforming law enforcement and the judicial system must remain at the centre of any efforts to establish durable peace. They proposed vetting of key justice sector personnel, developing and enforcing comprehensive laws and institutional and procedural changes aimed at combatting corruption and abuse of authority in justice sector institutions, along with adequate oversight to ensure the independence of justice institutions.

v) Promote Women's Rights and their Role in Peacebuilding

- Nationwide, people called for urgent action by the Government and international community to implement measures which would end the negative impact of harmful traditional practices on women's rights, and allow women to participate meaningfully in all peacebuilding initiatives.
- Afghans called on the Government to work proactively to raise awareness in all communities on harmful practices against women and girls, and work to fully implement the 2009 law on the Elimination of Violence against Women (EVAW law). Many Afghans agreed *"we must not allow either women's rights or human rights to be victimised"* (as part of any efforts to secure peace).

vi) Enable Youth through Fostering Job Creation and Strengthening the Education System

- Afghans noted with huge concern that the Taliban and other armed groups are easily able to recruit disenchanted youth who struggle to otherwise find meaningful employment. People stressed the need for specialised skills training centres and a robust job creation process including increased investment into construction and development projects which would require human resources.
- Afghan men, women and youth also stressed the need for the Government to establish a more functional and efficient education system for youth which would include more adequate infrastructure and quality of lessons. Afghans reiterated that improved educational infrastructure would help to accommodate additional students.
- Afghans called on the Government to ramp up efforts to reopen schools for girls in those districts where the presence of armed groups has violated Afghan girls' right to education.
- Ensuring a sounder quality of education was also said to require efforts towards building the capacity of teachers and adopting modern curricula, including science and technology, at all levels tailored more specifically to the capacity of students.

vii) Realise Equitable Social and Economic Development

- Afghans all viewed tangible progress in economic and social development, including concerted efforts towards strengthening the education system, creating employment opportunities and ensuring equitable access to development, as crucial to sustainable peace. A majority of Afghan men, women and youth stressed that despite some clear improvements, achievements have not been equal to the billions of dollars in donor aid spent in Afghanistan over the past 12 years. Progress should be measured not only on the quantity of services, such as the number of schools and hospitals built, but on the quality of these critical services.
- Afghans stressed that fostering employment opportunities, particularly for youth is imperative.
- Afghans noted that the persistent lack of equitable and sustainable development has had a particularly severe impact on vulnerable youth and destitute farmers, two segments of society affected by high rates of unemployment and lack of opportunity, illiteracy, susceptibility to drugs and the drugs trade in certain strategic provinces. They called on the Government to focus more proactively on fostering job creation and emphasised development investment in educational facilities for youth as ways to help curb the problem.
- Sustainable investment in the agricultural sector such as land extension and sufficient irrigation systems would also help improve rural economies. Private and Government-owned enterprises such as textile production, carpet production, resin cleaning, oil production and dairy factories could also create employment opportunities if they received adequate Government support.
- Afghans also noted that a large portion of communal disputes often arose around issues concerning uneven access to development assistance. The people highlighted that all Afghan citizens are equally entitled to benefit from development assistance regardless of their ethnicity, political connections, links with Government, geographic location or existence of conflict in their respective regions. Throughout the country Afghans emphasised the use of countrywide assessments to monitor development projects as a way to increase the effectiveness of development assistance.
- Overall, Afghans offered several concrete proposals on how sustainable development could be achieved in their regions. Due to the agrarian character of many Afghan provinces, a number of Dialogue participants stated that development aid should be directed towards the construction of hydro-electric water dams, which they stated would assist in combatting draught, foster job creation and provide a steady supply of power to their provinces.

viii) Ensure Inclusivity in the Peace Process

- Throughout the People's Dialogue, ordinary Afghans consistently emphasised that ensuring wider participation in the peace and reconciliation process – including by men, women, minority groups, civil society and especially youth – is central to its success. People believe increased participation by these segments of society would better ensure inclusivity and local ownership of the process.
- Many Afghans expressed concern that Afghan youth are not being encouraged to participate in local governance, which they believed also serves to frustrate peace. Greater youth participation could be achieved through the introduction of youth incentive programmes or through recruitment policies specifically aimed at targeting youth.

ix) Strengthen Community-based Dispute Resolution Mechanisms

- Dialogue participants noted that Afghans have a strong culture of addressing conflict and local dispute through people-led councils (*jirgas* and *shuras*). They universally stated that supporting

such local conflict resolution mechanisms in a way that serves the community's interests, including those of women and ethnic minority groups, would foster a political and social space in which ordinary people could engage with each other and with conflicting parties in a constructive dialogue for peace.

- A number of Afghans cautioned however that *jirgas* and *shuras* should not serve as forums for adjudication of serious human rights violations or for acts of violence against women.

x) Neutralise Spoilers of Peace

- To address the negative influence of peace spoilers, Afghans strongly advocated for vetting mechanisms based on objective criteria for both ex-armed combatants and leaders of the peace and reconciliation process. Afghans throughout the country believed that those who are involved in the peace process should be honest, influential, well-respected in their communities and democratically elected/appointed. People strongly recommended that those who have been accused of committing war crimes and crimes against humanity should be excluded from the peace process.
- Afghans living in border provinces urged the Government to do more to secure Afghanistan's borders and prevent the infiltration of armed groups into Afghanistan. Afghans reiterated their call for neighbouring governments to cease backing armed groups through the provision of material support (weapons and/or safe havens).

1. Introduction

The Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace (People's Dialogue) is a unique, Afghan-led initiative in which ordinary Afghan men, women and youth are given the space to express their views through inclusive discussions on the prospects for durable peace, reconciliation, security, social and economic development, human rights, and rule of law in Afghanistan. Emphasising peacebuilding and conflict prevention, the People's Dialogue puts Afghans at the heart of the process by empowering ordinary men, women and youth to become their own advocates for peace. Eleven civil society organisations/networks¹ and the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, with facilitation and support from the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), sponsored and oversaw public discussions during both phases I and II of the People's Dialogue. Since its inception in late 2011, the Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace has involved more than 6,000 Afghan men, women and youth and elicited, amplified and communicated their views to national and international policymakers.²

Phase I of the People's Dialogue comprised 78 focus group discussions held in 31 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces,³ and involved more than 1,500 Afghan men, women and youth from diverse ethnic groups and socioeconomic backgrounds.⁴ The findings of phase I were published in a comprehensive report issued in December 2011, entitled *Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace, Laying the Foundations for an Inclusive Peace Process*.⁵ Summarising the key findings of phase I of the People's Dialogue, the report highlighted what ordinary Afghans throughout the country perceived to be the main obstacles to achieving sustainable peace which included: deteriorating security; injustice; weak rule of law institutions; pervasive corruption; lack of economic progress and social justice; and limited protection of human rights, including for women and girls.

The report for phase I of the People's Dialogue also noted a general consensus that impunity should not persist for individuals who had committed serious human rights violations throughout Afghanistan's turbulent past, and proposed targeted recommendations voiced by ordinary Afghans to their Government, the international community, the armed opposition and Afghan civil society. The report enabled Afghan civil society organisations to carry the diverse voices of Afghan men, women and youth

¹ An Afghan civil society-led steering committee comprised of 12 members oversaw and guided the work of both phases I and II of the Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace. Members include: the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC); Afghan Civil Society Forum (ASCF); Afghan Civil Society & Human Rights Network (ACSHRN); Afghan National Union of Labour (AMCA); Afghanistan Organization of Human Rights & Environmental Protection (AOHREP); Afghan Women's Network (AWN); Afghan Women Skills Development Centre (AWSDC); Afghan Youth Social Cultural Organization (AYSCO); Civil Society Development Center (CSDC); Sanayee Development Organization (SDO); Transitional Justice Coordinating Group (TJCG); and the Women Political Participation Committee (WPPC).

² During phase I, the People's Dialogue involved over 1,500 ordinary Afghans in focus group discussions conducted throughout Afghanistan. Phase II involved 4,648 men, women and youth.

³ Phase I Dialogues were held in: Bamyan, Baghlan, Badakhshan, Badghis, Daikundi, Faryab, Farah, Ghazni, Ghor, Herat, Jawzjan, Kabul, Kapisa, Kunduz, Kandahar, Khost, Kunar, Laghman, Logar, Mazar-e-Sharif, Nangarhar, Nimroz, Nuristan (participants travelled to Jalalabad), Panjshir, Paktika, Paktya, Sar-e-Pul, Samangan, Takhar, Uruzgan, and Zabul.

⁴ An emphasis was placed on ensuring that marginalised and minority groups, women and youth, and people from remote/rural communities actively participated in both phases I and II of the Dialogue. Concerted efforts were also taken to ensure participants represented the ethnic make-up of their respective provinces. The broad consultation and inclusivity fostered by both phases I and II of the People's Dialogue was welcomed by all participants.

⁵ *Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace, Laying the Foundations for an Inclusive Peace Process*, December 2011, available at <http://www.aihrc.org.af/media/files/People%27s%20Dialogue%20FINAL%20report.pdf>.

to the International Conference on Afghanistan ('Bonn Conference') on 5 December 2011 ensuring that the voices of ordinary Afghans – their opinions, grievances and legitimate desires – would be heard and considered in future efforts made by all policymakers to achieve sustainable peace in Afghanistan.

Phase II of the People's Dialogue was launched in April 2013. As in phase I, phase II was implemented with the aim of promoting an inclusive, transparent and accountable peace process by obtaining people's views on the future direction of their country. Afghan civil society involved 4,648 Afghan men, women and youth in phase II of the People's Dialogue (with 67 per cent male and 33 per cent female participation in inclusive focus group discussions) in an effort to obtain ordinary people's views in identifying perceived local drivers, as well as corresponding solutions, to the decades-long conflict they have endured. Phase II participants represented a broad spectrum of Afghan society from all walks of life, and included housewives, shopkeepers, teachers, farmers, students, community elders and religious leaders, youth, former armed opposition (ex-Taliban) and beneficiaries of development projects.⁶ Nearly 200 focus group discussions, led by Afghan civil society representatives, were held in all 34 provinces of the country.⁷ In addition, a large number of participants were given the opportunity to express their views on peace and reconciliation through individual interviews and opinion-based surveys.⁸

Key issues and proposed solutions raised by the 4,648 individuals involved in phase II of the People's Dialogue led to the creation of 30 local road maps for peace.⁹ These local road maps serve to identify the reasons for, and solutions to, the prevailing conflict at both the district and provincial-levels, as well as at the national-level.

By soliciting the views of ordinary Afghan citizens on the issues that impact their lives most, and by giving voice to those views, the People's Dialogue aims to promote an inclusive, rights-centred peace process. The current report is based on qualitative data analysis and represents a summary of the main findings and views expressed by Afghans throughout the country. The provincial road maps produced further enable ordinary Afghans to present a peacebuilding blueprint for their respective provinces to national and international policymakers at all levels, and may serve to form the basis for local peace agreements.

⁶ Steps were taken to foster the participation of women; the composition of Afghans involved in phase II of the People's Dialogue indicates a fair gender balance, given that women and girls in rural communities are often prohibited from or choose not to, based on conservative attitudes, partake in civil society initiatives. The People's Dialogue aimed to address this challenge through the organisation of separate focus groups discussions for women in order to promote an inclusive process.

⁷ Phase II Dialogues were held in all 34 provinces of Afghanistan and led to the production, to date, of 30 provincial road maps for peace in: Badakhshan, Badghis, Baghlan, Balkh, Bamyan, Daikundi, Farah, Faryab, Ghazni, Ghor, Helmand, Herat, Jawzjan, Kabul, Kandahar, Kapisa, Khost, Kunar, Kunduz, Laghman, Logar, Maidan Wardak, Nangarhar, Nuristan, Paktya, Panjshir, Parwan, Samangan, Sari Pul, and Takhar. Road maps for the four (4) remaining provinces – Nimroz, Paktika, Uruzgan and Zabul – are to be produced.

⁸ Some 870 Afghans took part in individual surveys and interviews.

⁹ Ten (10) local road maps will be presented at a national conference in Kabul in the summer of 2014 (Balkh, Daikundi, Farah, Kabul, Kandahar, Khost, Kunar, Kunduz, Logar, and Maidan Wardak). The remaining 20 local road maps will be made public in the latter half of the year. All local road maps will be available in English, Dari and Pashto and are aimed at informing provincial-level policy, based on the views and aspirations of local people.

2. Key Drivers of Conflict

“Basically, our politicians say one thing to the people, but do something entirely different.”

—People’s Dialogue participant, Kandahar province

Through a series of focus group discussions organised throughout the country, Afghan men, women and youth involved in phase II of the Afghan People’s Dialogue on Peace expressed their opinions on the root causes of conflict in their regions.¹⁰ Specific concerns included widespread corruption, abuse of authority and entrenched impunity; deteriorating security; deepening ethnic, tribal and factional conflict; lack of sustainable social and economic development and unemployment; competition over the control of illicit economies (*i.e.*, opium poppy cultivation and drug trafficking); and the impact of the conflict on youth.

Afghan people’s discontent with their Government due to corruption, weak rule of law and pervasive human rights violations were offered as primary reasons for the continuation of the conflict. Similarly, Afghans the country over, while offering tangible solutions, expressed doubt as to whether any of the on-going peace efforts¹¹ could achieve a just and sustainable peace in their respective provinces.

2.1 Widespread Corruption, Abuse of Authority and Entrenched Impunity

Throughout the country, Afghan men, women and youth universally identified corruption, abuse of authority and impunity as the primary underlying drivers of conflict and instability. People asserted that corruption and associated abuse of authority, which embodies different facets and levels of exploitation, is a widespread problem within both Government and society as a whole. A community elder from Nahr-e Shayee district of Balkh province expressed a view echoed throughout the country:

“Corruption is like cancer and has been accepted as a rule. I strongly believe—and I’m sure that everyone here agrees with me—that this unfortunate phenomenon is the biggest reason for the continuation of conflict in our country.”

A man from Kandahar city expressed his frustration with the Government by describing apparent flaws in the electoral process:

“People get elected because they buy votes. Thus, their first priority once in office is to make as much money as possible [to earn back their expenses]. Only once this is achieved might they consider working for the citizens.”

On corruption within the judiciary, another male participant from Kandahar province lamented:

¹⁰ The methodologies of both phases I and II of the People’s Dialogue incorporated various peace research methods including focus group discussions, one-to-one in-depth interviews with selected individuals, and surveys of opinion.

¹¹ Such as the Afghan Peace and Reintegration Programme (APRP). See Section 2.6 at p. 16 for further information on people’s views on the APRP.

“Our judicial system is totally corrupt. The criminals are free and the innocent are in prison!”

A housewife from Khinjan district in Baghlan province similarly noted how perpetrators enjoy full impunity:

“My 23 year-old son was killed during fighting between Jihadi commanders in Khinjan district. Although I know the perpetrator, I cannot do anything. My only hope is that the Government will prosecute him.”

Due to the perceived existence of system-wide corruption, many Afghans involved in the People’s Dialogue noted the link between widespread corruption, rule of law and justice. For example, one schoolteacher from Argun district in Badakhshan province explained:

“People obtain justice when perpetrators are punished for their crimes. Impunity in Afghanistan must end, and we the people must stand up against those criminals who have committed crimes in the past and walk free. Impunity has negative consequences—it offers moral support to perpetrators to commit crimes again. Punishing perpetrators can serve as a powerful deterrent so that others will not dare commit the same crime(s).”

Throughout Afghanistan, people expressed the view that corruption offers a ‘path to influence’ and that impunity is a direct by-product of corruption within, for example, the justice system. They pointed to a sustained legacy of impunity which has become the status quo for both crimes committed in the past and those committed more recently. Afghans explained that the Government apparatus, including the police, prosecution departments and the judiciary alike, are responsible for promoting a culture of impunity by allowing perpetrators to go unpunished. Regarding this legacy of impunity, one religious elder in Faryab province noted:

“The main cause of conflict, particularly at the district level, is the Government (local administrators). In many districts throughout Faryab, local officials are not performing their duties properly or honourably—they are extremely corrupt. When the lands of ordinary people are occupied by powerbrokers, local officials do not listen to our complaints. For example, the decision-makers in Qaisar are two powerbrokers [both members of parliament]. They have divided Qaisar into two parts. District authorities cannot or will not interfere in their decisions.”

A vast majority of Afghans highlighted bribery, embezzlement and nepotism as common practices at almost all layers of Government – particularly within the law enforcement and judiciary – rendering these institutions ineffective to provide legitimate services to the people and thereby widening the considerable gap between Afghans and their Government. A member of the Jalalabad Labour Union explained how frustration with the system fuels further conflict and drives people towards the insurgency:

“The judiciary and prosecution offices only support people who have money. One of our labourers had a dispute with a warlord who had grabbed his house. The labourer had all the requisite documents demonstrating ownership, and while three separate courts found in his favour, he still couldn’t get his house back. He left Afghanistan and joined the Taliban—he wants revenge against the warlord.”

Similarly, nearly all participants revealed that favouritism and bureaucracy within justice institutions force community members to seek alternative means to resolve their civil and criminal grievances, including referring to local/traditional dispute resolution mechanisms or Taliban courts operating in their areas. A farmer from Kunar province noted:

"People tend to favour local shuras to resolve both criminal and civil cases, which creates a negative impression for the reputation of official justice institutions."

A resident of Qala-e-Naw district, Badghis province agreed:

"The other reason [people support the Taliban] is poor governance. People have no hope when it comes to Government activities, and are instead going to Taliban courts."

A local NGO representative in Laghman province echoed:

"There is no option but to get a Taliban court to resolve our disputes."

Participants levied strong criticism on the Government about patronage-based and corrupt appointments of Government officials both at the national and local levels, which they believe serves as one of the leading sources of people's discontent with the Government. Administrative corruption was viewed as a system-wide grievance in Daikundi province, especially within judicial organs. Participants from Shahrstan district in Daikundi explained:

"The corrupt Government is discriminating among the many Afghan ethnicities, and there is no merit-based system for recruitment of officials. Systematic human rights violations are on-going, and the resultant poverty and culture of impunity are causing local disputes."

A defence lawyer from Daikundi elaborated:

"The weak and corrupt justice system undermines security and results in fuelling further conflict."

While a journalist from Daikundi confirmed:

"When the justice system does not function properly, it nurtures a desire for revenge within us."

Similarly, speaking on the recruitment process for Government appointments, a journalist from Faryab province noted:

"The Government's recruitment process is in itself corrupt; people from the provincial-level go off to Kabul and buy themselves Governmental positions. Once they obtain their jobs, they have to collect bribes for people in Kabul in order to hold onto those jobs."

Likewise, a former Jihadi commander in Panjshir province expressed frustration with the widening gap in trust between the Government and people:

"The social and political fabric of the society has changed since the Jihad. In the past there was only one leader, Ahmad Shah Massud, but presently we have several leaders who think about

their personal interests before they think about us, the people. Our current leaders are not aware of community problems; they do not even talk with us."

A civil society activist from Helmand province agreed:

"The first and foremost reason for conflict is the distance that exists between the Government and the people. Unfortunately, that distance is growing year by year."

Such views were expressed in discussions throughout the country. A vast number of participants also reported that corruption in line-departments leads to an unfair distribution of resources and unequal delivery of development assistance. This exacerbates inter and intra-communal disputes, as one civil society activist from Laghman described:

"The theft of NSP¹² funds by tribal elders or the allocation of project resources to areas of personal benefit to shura members has heightened pre-existing and underlying tensions between communities and tribes."

A Provincial Peace Council member provided the following illustration of corruption within the judiciary in Helmand province:

"I saw a man imprisoned for years because he stole a bicycle. By contrast, a murderer was freed. People cannot fathom such corruption; some of them join armed groups due to their frustration and disgust with the arbitrariness of the justice system . . . There are also allegations against some district governors, yet those individuals still retain their official posts. The Government has ignored their corruption. There are strong forces within our system who want to keep the culture of impunity alive."

Afghans consistently complained how corruption in turn supports unequal application of the law. A well-educated man in Kandahar province, for example, pointed out perceived double-standards in the punishment of insurgents who have committed human rights abuses or other crimes:

"The small fry among the insurgents and fighters are punished and thrown in prison. By contrast, the more senior but also far more guilty commanders are powerful and influential enough to negotiate a comfortable 'retirement package' for themselves—maybe a cushy job in Kabul, maybe a role as negotiator in the peace process."

Another participant from Kabul also criticised unequal application of the law as a major concern:

"The lack of implementation of the law by Government authorities, breach of the law by all three pillars of Government (president, parliament and the judiciary) and the lack of equal application of the law to all Afghan citizens are our key concerns. The law is applied to poorer people but never to the son of a minister, for example. There is obviously a lack of social justice in Afghanistan. Individual human rights necessitate Government protection."

¹² The National Solidarity Programme (NSP) was created in 2003 by the Afghan Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development.

Reflecting on the problem, the director of a local madrasa in Alishang district, Laghman province, proposed the introduction of an oversight mechanism to battle widespread corruption:

“An independent commission which would be comprised of different ministries should be established to monitor Government institutions. The commission should employ investigators, or individuals to gather information on illegal activities [corruption] involving officials.”

Despite an overall expression of grievances, a few Afghans involved in the Dialogue noted the perceived integrity and value of certain Government officials. One civil society activist in Kandahar province, for example, acknowledged:

“There are also competent, honest and capable people in Government. We must identify them, encourage them and cooperate with them. But they are a small minority.”

Similarly, civil society activists in Kandahar province remained overall constructive in their approach to the rampant problems within Afghan Government institutions, favouring a progressive build-up of trust between the Government and civil society:

“Part of this mistrust exists because the Government is simply unfamiliar with the role and tasks of non-governmental actors in a democratic society. We should increase communication, get to know each other, and work towards building constructive relationships.”

2.2 Deteriorating Security

Afghan men, women and youth involved in the Dialogue rarely attributed their security to the effectiveness of State institutions. Pointing to the high level of civilian casualties, almost all Afghans in focus group discussions noted that the security situation had gradually worsened countrywide, especially when compared to the relative calm experienced during the immediate aftermath of the Taliban regime (late-2001 to 2006).

Following rampant corruption and weak rule of law, the majority of phase II participants viewed the deteriorating security situation and the associated rise in civilian casualties throughout the country as the secondary threat to peace and stability and the protection of human rights in Afghanistan.

Lack of Effective Afghan National Security Forces

People’s Dialogue participants primarily attributed prevailing insecurity to the lack of effective, both in terms of quality and quantity, Afghan national security forces (ANSF), premature transition of security responsibilities from international military forces to ANSF, and growing public resentment towards the Government and pro-Government forces. Such resentment stemmed from what participants called abusive and insensitive actions perpetrated by both ANSF and international military forces, as well as by Afghan National Police, Afghan Local Police, and pro-Government militias.¹³ A university student from Kunduz province pointed out the relationship between the Government and pro-Government militias:

¹³ Notably, the Afghan National Army (ANA) was largely viewed by participants in a favourable light.

“The Government does not want to stop supporting these abusive militias because they can be used against the insurgents. They are not paid and have their own weapons, so it is much more economical for the Government to use them, rather than funding the ANSF.”

A male elder from a rural district in Kandahar province questioned:

“Is there any difference between Afghan security forces and the Taliban? They are both cruel. The Government exploits us during the day, the Taliban terrorise us at night. Neither side respects our rights.”

Similar sentiments were expressed in discussions with men, women and youth throughout the country. People repeatedly raised concerns that they feel trapped between insurgents on the one hand and State forces and Government representatives on the other; the latter in particular were deemed to be self-serving and failing to act in the interests of the people.

‘States within the State’

In all provinces where prevailing insecurity was considered to pose a threat to local communities, Afghans consistently pointed to a lack of Government presence in remote as well as insecure or contested areas as a key driver of the conflict. The inability of the Government to maintain sufficient levels of national security forces in many parts of the country created a so-called security vacuum; people stated that the lack of ANSF presence has contributed to the resurgence of the Taliban and other abusive illegal armed groups in such areas. A woman from Taloqan district in Takhar province commented on deteriorating security nationwide and the lack of faith people have in Government protection:

“The main causes of the continuation of conflict are insurgency activity, sympathies the people have for the insurgents, and the lack of trust between the Government and its citizens. Ordinary Afghans have to reluctantly support the insurgents, as they do not believe the Afghan Government will save them from the Taliban.”

In discussions in many insecure parts of the country, Afghans stressed that fear stemming from Taliban infiltration and inadequate levels of national security forces has led the Government to outsource the security of its citizens to notorious local militiamen who have strong links with the various Government apparatuses. This phenomenon was referred to by participants in Kunduz province as having led to the creation of “states within the state”—where ‘law’ is administered locally rather than at the provincial- or national-level.

Similar views were also echoed in other parts of the country. One civil society activist voiced frustration about the detrimental impact of the proliferation of armed militia forces on the security situation in Badghis province, stating:

“Tribal elders create individual groups for their own benefit. The conflicts among the tribes then increase, and escalate to the point that they join armed groups (such as the Taliban) in the mountains.”

A community elder from Sayedkhil district, Parwan province discussed the expansion of armed groups and struggle for power in his area:

“Illegal armed people exist all over . . . They do not want peace because they would lose power. Therefore, they generate conflict among the communities. This is the unfortunate reality and the true limitation for peace in our communities. Until these groups are expelled, peace remains a dream.”

The arming and empowering of local militias and associated localised conflicts which then feed into the broader conflict, as well as the lack of accountability for a whole host of human rights violations perpetrated by these legally armed groups, was cited as a major driver of the armed conflict in discussions throughout Afghanistan. Afghan men, women and youth repeatedly cited the policy of outsourcing security as one of the major causes of the trust deficit between the people and their Government.

‘Premature Transition of Security Responsibilities’

The security vacuum has also been reflected in the context of what Afghans called the *“premature transition of security responsibilities”* from international military forces to the ANSF, as well as uncertainty surrounding the looming withdrawal of international military forces at the end of 2014. Afghans involved in the Dialogue were generally of the view that the reduced footprint of international forces and the transfer of security responsibilities from international forces, with their well-trained and sophisticated ground and air technologies, to ANSF, who are limited in terms of number, combat ability and air support, has created a security gap and emboldened insurgent groups.

Armed opposition groups use this security gap as part of their own propaganda and predict an easy-win over the ill-prepared ANSF. Group discussions in Maidan Wardak, for example, indicated that the insurgency there has gained momentum following the transfer of security responsibilities and the controversial withdrawal of US Special Forces from Nirkh district. Participants from Faryab noted similar uncertainty surrounding the withdrawal of international military forces, which they asserted has negatively impacted both ANSF and citizen morale, as described by a member of Faryab’s Women’s Council:

“Withdrawal of international military forces from Faryab has strengthened the morale of armed groups operating in Faryab. Since then, armed groups have managed to bring more areas under their control and influence. In many villages throughout Faryab today, people abide by Taliban law due to their dominant presence and influence.”

Afghan men, women and youth also expressed the negative consequences of poor public diplomacy on the part of the Government around the withdrawal of international forces, as reflected by one university lecturer:

“Sometimes politicians and policymakers, whether intentionally or not, make the security situation worse. For instance, they warned people that the Taliban will regain power in 2014 when the international military withdraws from Afghanistan. Such comments have boosted the morale of armed groups [in Faryab] and made ordinary people afraid.”

The Ever-widening Gap in Trust

The ever-widening gap in trust between Afghan people and their Government was consistently noted to be a major cause of insecurity and instability nationwide. Dialogue participants throughout the country expressed deep concern about growing public resentment towards their Government as a result of

abusive and insensitive actions by Afghan and international security forces, including the Afghan National Police, the Afghan Local Police, pro-Government militias and international military forces.

They recounted numerous abuses and human rights violations including killings, torture, arbitrary detention and illegal extortion perpetrated by these forces, which have been met with impunity. A tribal elder from Nurgaram district in Nuristan province alleged that an ANP officer who killed a local person still retained his position:

“An Afghan National Police officer killed a poor man within 40 metres of the ANP headquarters in Nuristan over a personal dispute. The ANP officer was arrested and held for two days, but escaped with 12 guns and has since joined the Taliban. The Government later invited him to join the peace and reintegration process. The officer has now returned and serves as an ANP officer again.”

A women’s rights activist in Puli-e- Khumri district, Baghlan province similarly expressed concern about the Afghan Local Police:

“The Afghan Local Police in Pul-e-Khumri are involved in human rights violations, such as abductions, extorting ushr [illegal tax] from people, and beating and harassing them. These issues are fuelling conflict and increasing pessimism among the population.”

Afghans also complained of night raids, air strikes and house searches conducted by international forces, often in culturally insensitive ways and/or based on faulty intelligence, which have led to unlawful killings, arbitrary arrests and have damaged civilian property, in turn contributing to a deepening sense of fear and animosity towards international military forces in certain communities. As pointed out by community elders in Sayedabad district, Maidan Wardak province on recent, controversial allegations of international forces’ involvement in enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrests and torture of civilians in the Nirkh, Maidan Shahr and Jalrez districts of Maidan Wardak:

“The international military forces carry out night raids. They do not respect either our culture or our traditions. When they need to search a house in a village, another ten houses around it suffer. And in the end, they find nothing.”

2.3 Ethnic, Tribal and Factional Conflicts

Throughout the People’s Dialogue, Afghan men, women and youth expressed grave concerns about deepening ethnic, tribal and factional animosity that drives insecurity and instability in their areas. People believe that ethnic tensions, tribal disputes and factional conflicts carry the potential to fuel the broader conflict between the Government and the armed opposition – with each party desperate to build alliances, consolidate their powerbase, accumulate arms and mobilise forces to undermine their rivals. Due in part of the Government’s fraying central authority, such local disputes, many people stated, have become persistent and have increased in number.

Afghans articulated the view that local government officials fail to intervene or are seen to be outright complicit in these factional conflicts. Moreover, in the absence of strong and/or lawful community-based dispute resolution mechanisms, insurgent groups and local powerbrokers were deemed to be

taking advantage of the situation to expand their influence over areas, by siding with one of the communities involved in any given dispute. One tribal elder from Panjshir province explained:

“A lot of conflict is caused by tribal disputes. The Taliban use these disputes opportunistically, to galvanize the support of one ethnic group over another, in order to fight the other. Fortunately, in Panjshir we all are from the same ethnicity [Tajik], but in other areas people are much more divided.”

Referring to Shahrak and Taiwara districts in Ghor province, however, a housewife observed that tribal infighting occurs as well:

“Tribal issues between the Pahlawan and Chishti tribes [both Tajik] in Shahrak and Taiwara create the most conflict among the people in those two districts.”

Participants were generally of the view that these ethnic and tribal conflicts often arose around perceived or real grievances regarding a lack of balanced representation in local Government, unfair/unequal distribution of resources, and a general sense of ‘hatred’ and ‘fear’ of rival communities, inspired in part by bitter memories of past antagonism.

Several cases of devastating ethnic and tribal conflicts were recounted by Afghan men, women and youth which led to killings, injury and, in some instances, ethnically motivated mass killings and the displacement of communities. Specific examples recounted included: the conflict between Hazara and Pashtun communities in the Khas Uruzgan district of Uruzgan province, the conflict between Hazara and Kuchi communities over pastoral land in Behsood district of Maidan Wardak, and the tribal conflict between Koshtuz and Kamdesh villagers over land in Kamdesh and Barg-e-Matal districts of Nuristan province.

One tribal elder explained how protracted ethnic and tribal conflicts led to large-scale human suffering and insecurity, citing as an example the case of Nuristan province:

“The dispute between the Koshtuz and Kamdesh villages has existed since the pre-Taliban era and has still not yet been resolved. On one occasion, the people of Kamdesh set fire to Koshtuz village and the entire village was burnt. These days, most Koshtuz residents have relocated to other parts of the country.”

‘Negative Political Rivalries’

Closely linked with tribal and ethnic conflicts has been what people involved in the People’s Dialogue referred to as ‘negative political rivalries’, driven by memories of animosity and competition over power and resources between political factions that emerged as part of the Jihad against the Soviet invasion in the 1980s, as well as resistance against the emergence of Taliban rule in the mid-1990s. Afghan men, women and youth noted that conflict between Jihadi political factions has seriously endangered peace and stability and undermined Government legitimacy in their areas.

A community elder explained the impact of negative political rivalries by recalling one occasion in 2012 in which the long-standing conflict between Hizb-e-Islami and Jamiat-e-Islami resurfaced in Argu district, Badakhshan province:

“When a Hizb-e-Islami figure transferred from Argu, his followers who numbered more than 500 demonstrated in front of the District Governor’s office and did not allow him to enter his office. This situation continued for weeks, and Hizb-e-Islami forces prevented anyone from entering the District Governor’s office. It was chaotic, and people were deeply concerned that armed conflict would break out in the district between the two parties.”

A male participant from Qarabagh district, Ghazni province, stated how division manifests itself in political representation, allocation of resources and job opportunities and acts as a driver of conflict:

“Inequality in political representation is also a cause of conflict. Certain tribes have more access to Government posts, whereas others have no representation and therefore remain poor. Government officials do not distribute resources equally: they favour their own people, and fuel further grievances.”

Countrywide, participants believed that despite the armed factions’ fighting, which has shifted from large-scale armed conflict to local disputes between competing groups, factional allegiance remains a serious dividing force. At the community level, such disputes have often flared into full-scale Taliban-led insurgency. Afghans also asserted that local commanders of the now defunct Jihadi political parties still retain their arms and men, and mobilise militias in support of the Taliban when they feel marginalised, threatened or when their names are removed from the Government payroll. A member of the Development Council in Chaharkint district, Balkh province, recounted:

“In our district, the major cause of conflict is long-standing factional animosity and fighting. This has divided our people: some joined pro-Government militias and others are connected with the Taliban. There has been severe fighting and many people have been killed or injured as a result.”

2.4 Lack of Social and Economic Development

Low Literacy, Unemployment and a Lack of Sufficient Infrastructure

Afghan men, women and youth who participated in phase II of the People’s Dialogue noted by general consensus that a severe lack of concrete social and economic development has been a critical driver of the conflict throughout the country. Informed individuals referred to the United Nations Human Development Index (HDI), which serves as the principal reference for both social and economic development worldwide, and which places Afghanistan at 175 out of 187 ranked countries in 2013.¹⁴

Many people said that the Government had not done enough to improve their living conditions. Across the country, Afghans stated that the lack of advanced infrastructure and employment opportunities, alongside a low literacy rate, were all primary underlying causes of poverty—which in turn fuels vulnerability and further conflict.

People also stressed that uneven development had resulted in inter and intra-communal disputes between more affluent communities and those villages, districts and provinces with the most pressing development needs. Similarly, during many discussions, a divide between urban and rural development was also raised. Afghan men, women and youth held the view that access to essential services was

¹⁴ United Nations Human Development Index (HDI), 2013, available at <https://data.undp.org/dataset/Table-1-Human-Development-Index-and-its-components/wxub-qc5k>.

limited, especially in rural areas, as the development of urban areas or provincial capitals has been prioritised and rural or remote areas have largely been ignored. According to many participants, much of the conflict plays out in these impoverished and remote areas which they termed 'marginalised'.

Participants highlighted poverty and conflict as 'two sides of one coin', believing that extreme conditions of poverty marked by a lack of infrastructure, high rates of unemployment and low literacy levels render already marginalised communities more prone to infiltration by insurgent groups. A woman from Dehdadi district's Development Council in Balkh province explained:

"I have been a social worker for the past few years and travelled in that capacity to most villages in Balkh province to speak with the many vulnerable communities here. Low literacy, unemployment and a lack of sufficient infrastructure are obvious. People living in such conditions are easily susceptible to manipulation by the Taliban."

A member of a local council in Helmand province also pointed out that people's frustration and willingness to resort to violence are indeed fuelled by a lack of basic services, stating:

"Low quality of education, joblessness, lack of fundamental services, such as electricity and water for agricultural activities, and lack of good governance drive the conflict."

Likewise, another participant from Wardoj district, Badakhshan province, reinforced this observation, highlighting the case of a former Jihadi commander:

"I know many ex-Jihadists from Wardoj district who are unemployed and living in miserable conditions. One of them joined the Taliban in Wardoj just for the financial incentive. This problem occurs because most ex-Jihadist fighters are now unemployed, living in poverty and basically needing to survive."

Corruption, Nepotism and Warlordism

People engaged in the Dialogue were aware that for decades, Afghanistan had been dependent on donor funding and the international community to help address the country's persistent development needs. Some were aware that at the Tokyo Conference in July 2012, the international community reaffirmed its commitment to Afghanistan under the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework (TMAF), pledging up to USD \$16 billion in future development aid. Afghans throughout the country however remained extremely sceptical that any future aid would trickle down to them, and raised serious concerns about the misuse, misappropriation and inequitable distribution of development assistance in the past.

People noted that, despite the vast amounts of development funds disbursed over the past 12 years, the lack of community infrastructure and services such as roads, bridges, schools and healthcare facilities continued to not only undermine stable governance but also resulted in enormous hardship and suffering among poor villagers whose daily lives were based on subsistence, far from meeting even basic needs. Men and women in some group discussions said that the central and local governments were generally considered as ineffective and disconnected from the real needs of the people. Many stated that corruption, nepotism within institutions and warlordism in some parts of the country undermined the authority of institutions and impeded economic development.

Participants in Uruzgan province highlighted that despite millions of dollars having been poured by the Government and international donors into development programmes in their province, no tangible progress had been seen. One community elder pointed out possible corruption as a factor:

"Millions of dollars have been spent in Uruzgan by international donors and the Government, but most of that money has unfortunately either been wasted or gone straight into the pockets of a handful of people . . ."

A representative of a juvenile council in Helmand province echoed:

"International organisations have spent hundreds of millions of dollars, yet people have not observed any changes in their daily lives. We do not even know what concepts like transparency and accountability mean. After three decades of war, Afghan people need to feel and experience development and improvement in their communities."

Similarly, the uneven distribution of public resources was also seen by Dialogue participants in Khost province as a driver of conflict. On unequal development, a religious scholar in Khost city commented:

"Those who don't receive any benefits from the Government would like to become a part of the conflict."

People in Nuristan province strongly objected to the lack of attention by the Government and international donors towards developing so-called marginalised provinces, which they believe has undermined the authority of their local government, encouraged the insurgency and led to the enormous suffering of the local population. A community elder from Nuristan province summed up these concerns:

"Provincial Council members are based in Nangarhar province and rarely travel to Nuristan. They are totally disconnected from their constituent communities . . . Most children are being educated in Pakistani madrassas due to the dearth of functioning schools and teachers here, where they become groomed for extremism and bring insurgency back with them . . . When a resident of Du Ab district wants to go to Parun [the capital of Nuristan] he or she must pass through three provinces [Laghman, Nangarhar and Kunar] and more than 15 districts. It takes days."

The unequal distribution of development assistance to all parts of the country was perceived by some Afghans to be based on ethnic preferences. Community members in Bamyan province were particularly sensitive to this perceived divide, stating that their communities feel isolated and neglected by the Government's seemingly arbitrary distribution of development assistance. A religious scholar from Saighan district in Bamyan explained:

"We see a high level of discrimination from the Government. Bamyan province, for example, is a peaceful province, and Helmand province is volatile, but the Government provides a USD \$6 million aid budget to Bamyan and a USD \$500 million one to Helmand. Bamyan should be incentivised for its peaceful environment, while here it is the opposite."

2.5 Competition over the Control of Illicit Economies

The 'Narco-Insurgency'

Throughout the consultative phase II Dialogue, Afghans stressed that opium poppy cultivation, the smuggling of drugs and illegal extortions by drug-traffickers had sustained or exacerbated the conflict in most areas – particularly in the southern, south-eastern, eastern, north-eastern and western regions of the country. Participants strongly believed that illicit revenues generated from the cultivation, processing, and trafficking of opium poppy, as well as drug addiction, directly benefitted insurgent groups, local militias and corrupt Government officials. Consequently, people blamed these groups for contributing in a direct way to further destabilisation and insecurity in remote areas where the illicit economy thrives, in order to preserve and increase personal gains. A female participant from Farah province explained:

“High incomes derived from the cultivation, processing and smuggling of opium poppy have encouraged the emergence of armed groups who band together and use the Taliban as cover to carry out their illegal businesses. These groups are comprised of illiterate and unemployed young men and are supported by the Taliban or other corrupt Government officials who seek to protect their control over opium poppy fields and extort money from cultivating farmers.”

A community member of Nad-e-Ali district in Helmand province complained that the lack of State support and associated poverty drives farmers to support the 'narco-insurgency':

“People need to cultivate poppy because the Government is not supporting agriculture in this province. Our district, for example, would be ideal for cultivating high quality cotton, but unfortunately the Government pays no attention—it does not buy our products, so what should we do? Farmers are under financial pressure. Water for irrigation is scarce and expensive. Most farmers cannot pay the money required to cultivate legitimate crops, so they resort to poppy cultivation.”

Tribal elders and other male community members from Qarabagh district, Ghazni province, recounted the problems facing Afghanistan with respect to drug addiction as a driver of conflict, stating:

“The use of drugs also promotes conflict; addiction to hashish and other illicit substances forces people to resort to insurgency to find money to buy drugs.”

Women in Ghazni city, Ghazni province, voiced concern for their children due to the prevalence of drugs and youth's susceptibility to recruitment by drug-related armed groups:

“Our youth are facing severe problems with idleness, and using opium, hashish and sometimes alcohol. When they become disappointed with their lives due to the lack of opportunities they face here, they turn to armed groups.”

Expanding on the problem of drugs as a driver of conflict, Afghans involved in the People's Dialogue highlighted the fact that much of the conflict plays out near drug-trafficking routes located throughout the country, because trafficking groups provide logistical and financial support to the insurgents to protect their drug convoys. One of the participants from Badakhshan province stated:

“The recent infiltration of the Taliban in Farghamonj, Kiev, Kateo, and Khostak villages of Jurm district and in the neighbouring areas of Wardoj district is part of a broader and more complex insurgency strategy to control vital roads which lead in and out of Badakhshan province. The Taliban want to establish safe transit routes in the province which will enable them to cross over into Central Asian states [where drugs can be exported for profit].”

The ‘Poppy Mafia’

Every People’s Dialogue participant from Badakhshan agreed that the cultivation and trafficking of opium poppy was a major cause of insecurity throughout the province, particularly in Drayem, Kishem, Teshkan and Argu districts. They blamed high-ranking State officials for their alleged involvement in opium cultivation and drug-trafficking. A male participant from Faizabad district said:

“I know of many high-ranking officials who are involved in the illicit trafficking of drugs but I cannot name them or I might be targeted. These officials have vested interests in opium production and its trafficking. Opium has destroyed our young generation, but no one can offer you names because we fear for our lives.”

A resident of Sangin district in Helmand province agreed, referring to the enablers of drug cultivation as the “poppy mafia” and accusing Government officials and armed groups of complicit involvement:

“Many groups in Government want to create and maintain insecurity to keep the profitable cultivation of poppy going. In Sangin we have massive swathes of fertile land conducive to the cultivation of any agricultural crop, but unfortunately the Government does not support us, so most farmers drift towards poppy cultivation. Armed groups use the income from opium sales to fund their insurgency.”

Afghan men, women and youth countrywide saw opium poppy cultivation and the struggle for control over its illicit economy as directly linked to high rates of unemployment and lack of economic opportunity, corruption within Government institutions, illiteracy, youth’s susceptibility to drugs and the influence of armed groups over vulnerable youth and destitute farmers.

2.6 The Current Peace Process

“I do not believe in the current peace process, as it is led by people who have been part of the conflict in the past. They have a lot to lose if peace arrives.”

– Former Jihadi commander, Balkh province

Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme

The Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme (APRP) is based on a Decree issued by President Hamid Karzai on 29 June 2010, which directed the implementation of efforts to build sustainable peace by emphasising assistance to insurgents who renounced violence and accepted the Afghan Constitution, aimed at reintegrating reformed insurgents back into their communities.

Throughout the country, many Afghans objected strongly to the on-going APRP which, in their view, functions contrary to its stated purpose. As opposed to claims made by the Government, participants

worried that the APRP has had a reverse impact on peace and stability—they believed the APRP is led by people who have a vested interest in continuing the conflict, in order to secure their own personal gains. The headmaster of a school in Mahmood Raqi district of Kapisa province lamented that:

“If one says he is working for peace in Afghanistan, the person is just acting as artists do in dramas. He plays that role for his own vested interest. No individual or group has an honest and clear road map for peace. Elders involved in the on-going so-called ‘peace efforts’ have their own vested interests too—they earn money from it. These efforts, including the APRP, are false, and they have neither a base nor a future.”

A man from Kabul city articulated what participants in Kabul saw as the failures of the APRP programme:

“The Government’s peace process was not successful and consequently failed. The armed conflict has increased; even the Head of the High Peace Council was killed. Those who run the peace process are not acceptable to the Taliban or even to most other people.”

A farmer from Shindabad district in Herat province echoed:

“The peace process is very weak; no one has even visited the districts to introduce the process. The other issue is that, when members of armed groups join the peace process, their lives are threatened. From one side they’re told by the Taliban that they will be killed for joining, and from the other side the Government fails to support them financially to have a better life.”

Afghan men, women and youth emphatically stated that the APRP has evolved into a Government-led project where heavy involvement and control of the process by security institutions has turned it into a counterinsurgency tool, undermining the meaningful participation of ordinary Afghan people to contribute to peace in their respective provinces. People’s Dialogue participants in Nangarhar province, for example, noted:

“The APRP is more identical to a counterinsurgency mechanism, rather than a peacebuilding programme.”

Participants generally reported that while recognising the need for certain incentives for insurgents to renounce violence and reintegrate into local communities, the economic opportunities, amnesties and reinstatement of reintegrees into positions of power, such as the recruitment of ex-combatants into the ranks of the Afghan Local Police, have served to fuel impunity and are often viewed as ‘rewards’ offered to insurgents.

Rather, people called for community-based development projects and, through vetting, identifying and removing those insurgents who are clearly responsible for gross human rights violations.

Throughout the country, many people voiced discontent with the APRP, stating that it lacks legitimacy and is used temporarily by insurgents for financial gain. A female civil society activist clarified perceived failures of the APRP as follows:

“The on-going demobilisation and reintegration of Taliban fighters is not serious. Indeed, the public parading and welcoming of former Taliban back into society by district or provincial authorities is just for show. Many insurgents view it as a joke: they sign up for the process, hand

in a useless old gun, get some money, keep a low profile for a few months and then re-join the insurgency."

Participants further revealed that the failure of the APRP to address grievances of disenfranchised communities and meet the expectations of ideologically motivated insurgents has been, to a large extent, due to widespread corruption and abuse of authority at the provincial-level within Provincial Peace Committees. A former reintegree from Faryab province alleged:

"We decided to join the peace process to play a positive role in the implementation of development projects, but were unfortunately not given that chance. The Provincial Peace Council in Faryab is totally corrupt. I joined the peace process with 100 rifles, but before speaking to the media, was asked by some provincial officials to say that I only had 71 weapons. This would have meant that 29 of my weapons would have been unaccounted for. Peace Council members and provincial officials took them. Also, some of our new weapons were swapped with useless ones."

Finally, participants, including ex-combatants, pointed to the APRP's inability to adequately address the plight of reintegrees, with regards to ensuring their security and providing employment opportunities, which has forced several reintegrees and ex-combatants to re-join the insurgency, or has also left a large number of interested, pro-peace insurgents on the fence. Such failures, according to Afghans, have contributed to strengthening the insurgency's network. A terrible example was provided by a former Taliban soldier in Chimtal district, Balkh province, who was later killed on his way home from participating in the Dialogue (though his death was unrelated to his participation in the People's Dialogue):

"I regret having joined the peace process. I haven't witnessed any changes in my life since I began cooperating with the Government. They promised they would give me a job or hire me into the ranks of the Afghan Local Police, but none of them were honest, and now I cannot even go back to my village because I fear the Taliban's reprisal. The Government played me, and now I feel abandoned."

Overall Afghans lamented that the APRP is led by people who have a vested interest in continuation of the conflict and that, rather than a mechanism for peacebuilding, the programme is viewed as an unsuccessful counterinsurgency tool that is used by a range of self-serving actors. Furthermore, reintegrees expressed dissatisfaction with the programme, stating that it failed to deliver on its promises and left them feeling used, unsupported in the long-run and vulnerable to attack for their cooperation with the Government. In essence, the APRP is viewed as a failure by all intended recipients.

Inclusivity – 'Ordinary People Can Play a Key Role'

Afghan men, women and youth also voiced strong criticism of the Provincial Peace Councils and said that ordinary people who can play a key role in convincing insurgents to join the peace process have not been consulted. A male participant from Chahardara district in Kunduz province said:

"The Government must make the peace process a more inclusive one. It should consult ordinary Afghans too, and collaborate with them to bring peace. Ordinary people such as community elders, mullahs, religious scholars and others must be consulted about the peace process."

A community leader from Maidan Shahr district, Maidan Wardak province echoed this view, stating that:

“The involvement of ordinary people, associations, civil society and women in the peace efforts gives more strength to the cause of the peace. It also helps to stimulate wider community support towards achieving peace.”

Another participant from Kabul city elaborated:

“A lack of coordination between the High Peace Council and the Afghan security forces has resulted in the failure to identify and recognise acceptable mediators/negotiators for both sides.”

A former civil servant explained why he believed the Provincial Peace Council in Helmand province was unable to reach out to more ordinary Afghans:

“The Provincial Peace Council [in Helmand] has its own limitations: the members are rarely able to travel to insecure and remote districts. To start with, they do not even have a travel budget to make such trips. To top it off, people simply do not trust the Provincial Peace Council.”

Others in Helmand province similarly expressed discontent that the Provincial Peace Council employs questionable individuals who are involved in criminal activity. A university student from Helmand explained:

“There are some people involved in the peace process who are actually extremists. They are not reliable guarantors of peace for the people . . . Because of these people’s involvement, the peace process is slow, inadequate and just unsatisfactory.”

The peace process and programmes such as the APRP were also widely criticised for their perceived failure to ensure the inclusive participation of traditionally marginalised groups such as women, youth and ethnic minorities – few have been included on Provincial Peace Councils. A female lawyer from Kunar province expressed concerns that were voiced by Afghans during numerous discussions around the country:

“We have some women in the Peace Council who have worked for the Government and are now the targets of armed groups. Their appointments have been largely symbolic—to show the international community that gender equality is respected in the peace process. But, women who do not work for the Government are in better positions to mediate between armed groups and the Government. Armed groups will not target ordinary women who reach out to them, as ordinary women are respected based on Afghan tradition as well as under the tenets of Islam.”

Participants in Paktya province agreed that the current actors are insufficient to contribute meaningfully to the peace process. One of the groups consistently mentioned as having the potential to serve as catalysts for peace were religious leaders and scholars. A student in Gardez district, Paktya province noted:

“Mullahs could use their knowledge and connections to enhance people’s understanding about peace. They could use their influence to prevent armed groups from entering their communities. They could also approach armed groups to encourage them to make peace.”

Overall, Afghans reiterated the need for an inclusive peace process that gives ordinary people a voice, reflects their concerns and aspirations and gives all people a stake in building the foundations for durable peace in Afghanistan.

2.7 Impact of the Conflict on Women's Rights

"In some villages and districts, it is as if men have the right to beat women. People in villages along with the elders also do not want girls to attend school and, frankly, do not want women to be educated at all."

—Farmer from Shindand district, Herat province

The vast majority of Afghan men, women and youth who participated in phase II Dialogue discussions were of the opinion that sustainable peace could only be achieved if women were actively involved in all aspects of the peace process. Afghans throughout the country, however, highlighted concerns stemming from traditional Afghan cultural norms and taboos which they believe continuously take a toll on Afghan women, and prevent them from participating in or reaping any benefits from peacebuilding initiatives.

Nationwide, participants revealed how Afghan women suffer from high levels of violence, often at the hands of their families, driven in part by what people termed inappropriate and harmful social norms and cultural practices. Participants called for urgent action by the Government and international community to adopt measures which would end the negative impact of harmful traditional practices on women's rights, in turn allowing women to take their rightful place at the fore of collective efforts to achieve durable peace in the country.

Participants from Ghor province spoke about the detrimental impact of 'honour killings' and how they cultivate within affected family members a desire for revenge, which in turn fuels local conflicts between communities and creates a cycle of retribution. In the Dawlatyar district of Ghor, for example, a local businessman noted:

"Women's rights should be respected because, in Ghor province, one of the drivers of conflict is revenge killings which result in or exacerbate tribal conflicts. Women here experience violations constantly."

Similarly, in Ghazni province, Afghans pointed to the south eastern region's particularly conservative culture, made worse for women by the lack of sufficient Afghan national security forces and growing Taliban presence and influence. One female from Qarabagh district in Ghazni explained how local culture prevents women from actively participating in public life:

"There are many constrains for women in our society, and traditions by which we women become totally excluded. Women in the districts are under immense pressure; there are no educational opportunities for them, and working out of our homes is impossible. Men whose wives work for the Government or other institutions experience shame and rejection, which in turn fuels many problems in our society."

Often when Afghan women and girls leave their homes without a *mahram*, or without providing information to their families about their location, they are arbitrarily arrested and charged with ‘running away from home’. A young female who participated in the People’s Dialogue from Takhar provincial prison, where she is currently detained for ‘running away from home’, explained the detrimental impact of this culturally-rooted discrimination:

“Violence against women and traditional practices prevent one group of society, namely women, from taking an active part in bringing peace and stability to Takhar. These traditional practices are repugnant to the principles of Islam.”

In Alasai district, Kapisa province, participants lamented the fact that there are no schools open for girls to attend, while in Tagab district the majority of girls’ schools are closed. Afghan men, women and youth in Kapisa linked this problem to the presence of insurgents, noting that the presence and proliferation of the Taliban has prevented the Government from asserting its control in these areas, thereby negatively affecting the rights of women and girls and subordinating those rights to the desires of armed groups, who hold extremely conservative values hostile to human and women’s rights and contrary to the fundamental tenets of Islam.

Finally, participants expressed concern over heightened insecurity during provincial council and presidential elections, which has a particularly negative impact on women’s right to political participation, denying women the right to a say in the future direction of the country. One female from Taloqan city explained:

“Some parts of Takhar province become more unstable due to elections. If any polling site becomes insecure on Election Day, it is of course very difficult for the voters, mostly female voters, to go out and cast their votes.”

2.8 Impact of the Conflict on Youth

“Youth are raw material for the on-going conflict. Most are jobless . . . so they are easily recruited.”

—Local defence lawyer, Laghman province

‘Education is the Key to Security’

Afghans involved in the People’s Dialogue largely agreed that the conflict has had a disparate and unyielding impact on Afghan youth. Problems faced by youth stem from their experiences with the problems addressed above at all levels of society, including access to adequate education, lack of or weak local governance, drug trafficking and rising unemployment. Speaking on corruption within the education system, a group of women from Kunar province including teachers, housewives, doctors and university students stated that:

“Corruption in the Department of Education and in universities and schools has increased. The students who can pay bribes or whose relatives have good positions in Government can pass the kankoor [university admission] exam. Those who graduate but do not have the money to pay bribes or who do not have relatives in the Government cannot find jobs.”

A resident of Nad-e-Ali district in Helmand province also criticised the Department of Education, stating:

“Our district is only 12 kilometres from the provincial capital, yet we have no proper schools or facilities for students and teachers. Sometimes we have teachers and schools, but then there are no students, so the teachers who are collecting salaries do not actually work. The Department of Education is drowning in corruption.”

A female university teacher from Kandahar province explained why she believed education was so vital to youth:

“Education is the key to security. Educated people don’t fight! Look at us here in this room – we don’t quarrel. Educated husbands who have good, well-paid jobs won’t beat their wives.”

A number of female high school and university students in Khost city, Khost province also highlighted how education serves as a barrier to protect youth from recruitment by armed groups:

“In the absence of education, it is easy for armed groups to manipulate the minds of young generations and turn them towards the conflict.”

A village leader from Gozara district in Herat province agreed:

“The main driver conflict is illiteracy. There is a big difference between youth from the city and those from a district or village: when youth live further away from educational facilities, they do not learn to differentiate between right and wrong; they turn towards the conflict and join armed groups.”

Afghan men, women and youth from Laghman province noted weak local governance, a deficiency in public services and unfair resource distribution as drivers of the conflict which impact youth in a number of ways. Hampered development, high rates of poverty, unemployment and illiteracy have pushed many youth from Laghman to join armed opposition groups. An adviser to the Provincial Council in Laghman province stated that most individuals recruited by armed groups are between the ages of 14 and 25.

With regards to drug trafficking, participants from Badakhshan province viewed opium production as one of the main challenges facing Badakhshan’s youth, due to poverty, lack of job opportunities, and the alleged involvement of powerful personalities in illicit economies. A father from Shahr-e-Buzorg in Badakhshan district recalled:

“My son was unemployed. He was unable to earn for himself and his family, and therefore compelled, as it were, to transport a few kilograms of heroin from Afghanistan to Tajikistan. He was arrested and imprisoned for many years. There are many poor youth like my son from Shahr-e-Buzorg district who were compelled by circumstance to transport drugs because they do not have another way to make money . . . Only the sons of poor people are arrested because they are the ones who traffic drugs as a way of earning for their families.”

Participants from Kunduz province also categorised youth unemployment as a major driver of conflict stressing that once more people become employed they will no longer be lured by insurgents or have the time or desire to engage in any anti-peace activities. Men, women and youth throughout the

country agreed that employed individuals would see prosperity, have a direct interest in securing lasting peace and would never join or re-join the insurgency.

In discussions, people consistently suggested that more employment opportunities be provided by the Government as a measure to combat conflict. A community elder from Aliabad district in Kunduz explained:

“We have a common maxim that the mind of an unemployed person is the nursery of Satan. The crux of the problem is unemployment, and unemployment is the main reason that people, especially unemployed youth, join the insurgency.”

Participants from Kandahar province offered an example of why they believe the Afghan Government is not doing enough to promote equitable employment opportunities for youth, stating that:

“As soon as people are in power, they selfishly give all the jobs to their own relatives. This alienates citizens. Unemployment is particularly severe in rural areas. Young men who are jobless and see how corrupt the Government is become easy prey for Taliban recruiters, who exploit their frustration and lure them with a regular salary and perhaps even a motorbike.”

In discussions throughout Afghanistan, men, women and youth expressed the multi-faceted impact of the conflict on youth, including the consequences of unemployment and lack of opportunities which they linked to corruption and lack of equitable development.

3. The Road Map for Peace

“Unfortunately, the Government is accountable to the warlords, not to the people.”

— Female teacher, Balkh province

Afghan men, women and youth participating in phase II of the People’s Dialogue proposed a wide range of context-specific, locally driven peacebuilding solutions aimed at addressing the root causes of conflict in their respective provinces. Participants offered concrete and practical proposals for how durable peace could be achieved, which generally fell under the inter-related themes and initiatives detailed below.

3.1 Promoting Responsive State Institutions

Afghans stressed that the key to establishing durable peace and stability throughout Afghanistan lies in restoring the legitimate authority of the State. The vast majority of Afghans involved in the People’s Dialogue noted that the legitimacy of local government institutions has been critically undermined by a lack of public confidence in local governance at the district and provincial-levels, prevailing corruption and abuse of authority within security and local government institutions as well as a lack of responsive, democratic and professional security forces in many areas – in particular the Afghan Local Police and pro-Government militias.

Tackling Corruption

Almost all People’s Dialogue participants shared the view that perceived illegitimacy of local governments was the main driver of insecurity and instability in their province. They generally attributed this concern to pervasive corruption, abuse of authority and the influence of powerbrokers and warlords over local governments.

Men, women and youth stressed the need to strengthen checks and balances which would oversee local government institutions. They desired accountable, transparent and efficient local governments which they affirmed as central to ensuring durable peace. People strongly called for the implementation of reform programmes, including measures for removing corrupt officials, ensuring merit-based appointments of local government employees, and introducing more efficient administrative procedures. Furthermore, enhancing the capacity and oversight of State institutions such as the High Office of Oversight, prosecution departments and the judiciary were asserted as vital measures which would contribute significantly to ending rampant corruption and abuse of authority throughout the country and, in turn, serve to enhance the delivery of justice, rule of law and human rights for all by the State.

Strengthening Security Institutions

A common view reflected in discussions was that failure on the part of the Government to secure peace and stability is due to a severe deficiency in the capacity of the State to effectively exercise its authority. The State’s limited reach was viewed as a central factor in the Government’s inability to maintain authority over swathes of territory as well as to peacefully manage local conflicts. Afghans in general acknowledged progress achieved on reforming and strengthening the ANSF and, notably, reported a

much higher level of confidence in the Afghan National Army. Serious complaints, however, were repeatedly raised about criminal and abusive behaviour, including gross violations of human rights, perpetrated by the Afghan National Police, Afghan Local Police and other pro-Government militias.

To build effective, responsive and democratic security forces, Afghan men, women and youth proposed establishing and expanding the functions of security institutions, both in terms of infrastructure and professional human capital. Afghans asserted that they desire continued support to build, professionalise and ensure an ANSF response to the needs of the people, which they sought to remain a common goal of national and international actors involved in the Afghan State-building process.

Of the 4,648 Afghan men, women and youth consulted during phase II of the People's Dialogue, an overwhelming majority believe that the continuous support and cooperation of the international community in equipping and training the ANSF is vital to strengthening the capacities of these forces, and to maintaining security after complete international military forces' withdrawal by the end of 2014. The views of one civil society activist from Khost province reflected the nationwide consensus on the repercussions of a premature international forces departure:

"We can see positive changes but these are not permanent. When there are no international military forces in Afghanistan, I am afraid we will lose all the achievements."

The director of a local radio station in Nangarhar province articulated the views expressed by many on the role of the Government and international military in strengthening and reforming the ANSF:

"In order to end the war, Afghan security forces must be seriously reformed, supported and equipped. The Government should take measures to address corruption by high-ranking officials and punish perpetrators."

Afghans generally believed that prevailing corruption and abusive behaviour by the ANSF – particularly the Afghan National Police, Afghan Local Police and other pro-Government militias – has disenfranchised local communities, and thereby encouraged people to side with insurgent groups. To restore confidence in the ANSF, participants throughout the country suggested that local communities be empowered and enabled to report human rights and other abuses perpetrated by the ANSF, and that the ANSF's unlawful actions be investigated and duly punished. In other words, participants sought a functional (fair and effective) criminal justice system/mechanism to oversee ANSF actions.

Participants also believed that a number of donor funded programmes and people-led, community peacebuilding initiatives such as the community policing programme of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and village-level peace and development councils have been instrumental in addressing the trust deficit between communities and Afghan National Police. Afghans also reported that such initiatives have the potential to serve as a community oversight mechanism over police behaviour, as well as a possible community-based vetting mechanism for appointments to the Afghan Local Police.

Throughout the People's Dialogue, participants called for the disarmament of illegal armed groups and other pro-Government militias, which they emphasised as critical to tackling the illegitimate influence of local powerbrokers and warlords over local government institutions. This, people asserted, would in turn strengthen peace and stability at the district-level. Afghans throughout the country strongly sought

continuation of the Disarmament of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG) programme, which was launched by the Government in June 2005 but concluded in March 2011.

3.2 Promoting Human Rights, Rule of Law and Tackling Impunity

Throughout the People's Dialogue process, participants commonly believed that proactive and concerted efforts to promote and protect human rights, enhance rule of law and address impunity should be the underlying goals of the Government, civil society and international community. A participant from Paktya province summed up the sentiments of the majority:

"This is the wish of the Afghan people: to implement human rights and end corruption."

A majority of Afghans referred to the negative impact of the conflict on the enjoyment of human rights. A female participant from Khost city in Khost province explained:

"Where there is war, you cannot secure all your basic and constitutional rights: males and females lose their rights, even very important rights such as the right to life and the right to education. Local disputes also deprive men and women from realising those rights. For example, if there is a fight between two tribes in an area, none of the sides can send their children to school, they lose access to healthcare, and so on . . ."

Similarly, a religious scholar from Khost city echoed the above, noting that:

"If there is respect for human rights, there is no doubt that the level of violence and conflict will come down."

In a factionalised and traditional society, however, the promotion and protection of human rights was not entirely welcome. Some participants raised concerns about growing hostility towards the notion of human rights due to the perception that human rights were an imported, Western concept which in certain respects contradict the tenets of Islam and/or traditional Afghan values. A majority of participants however felt that such negative sentiment was driven by a narrow understanding of human rights. A female teacher in Balkh province explained why some in Afghan society do not believe in human rights:

"Some people in Afghanistan are against human rights because they believe it is against their [traditional] values . . . The problem is not human rights but in the way they are introduced . . . Human rights are about education, food, employment, freedom of movement, etc. . . . Provisions of the holy Quran are consistent with human rights standards on women's rights."

Most participants who spoke on human rights generally advocated for an increase in the number and quality of human rights awareness programmes to familiarise society with human and women's rights which would be viewed by all as compatible with Afghan society and culture.

Afghans also generally expressed deep concern about human rights abuses and civilian casualties resulting from the actions of international military forces and the ANSF. They believe that airstrikes, night raids and house searches based on faulty intelligence have led to killings, injuries and infringements of social and cultural values. Such actions, according to the men, women and youth

involved in the People's Dialogue, act as a driver of conflict by encouraging local communities to allow insurgent groups to infiltrate their districts in order to right the wrongs committed upon them. Therefore, participants strongly advocated for practical steps to be taken by the Government and international community to ensure the safety and security of civilians during armed counterinsurgency operations, as well as to protect their fundamental human rights in that context.

Nearly all Dialogue participants expressed vocally their desire for stronger rule of law, transparent, accountable and efficient state institutions, and an end to Afghanistan's legacy of impunity—measures which they believe are crucial to achieving durable peace in their provinces. An overwhelming majority of participants suggested that reforming law enforcement and judiciary apparatuses must remain at the centre of any efforts to establish durable peace.

They acknowledged positive achievements in the justice sector over the past 12 years, particularly legal reform via the presence of justice institutions in remote areas. Afghans asserted that practical steps including, but not limited to, vetting and public scrutiny of key justice sector personnel, developing comprehensive laws as well as institutional and procedural adjustments aimed at combatting corruption and abuse of authority within justice sector institutions, along with adequate oversight to ensure the independence of those institutions are critical steps towards ending the legacy of impunity in Afghanistan.

3.3 Promoting Women's Rights and their Role in Peacebuilding

Afghan men, women and youth almost universally expressed the view that the inclusion of women in peacebuilding initiatives was paramount to achieving durable peace in Afghanistan. Participants further saw the need for an end to years of harmful practices against women and girls, and for women to have a more prominent role in local government positions. Afghans also cautioned that cases concerning violence against women should not be adjudicated through traditional dispute resolution which in their view has a history of siding with the perpetrator rather than the victim.

In Bamyan province, during every focus group discussion held, Afghans emphasised the promotion of women's rights and the involvement of women in the peace process. Men, women and youth were particularly vocal about the fact that women can have a pronounced effect in all peacebuilding processes. They suggested that the Government and civil society work to establish awareness raising campaigns on the rights of women, which they believe could address the plight of women in their province. One man from Yakawlang district noted:

"In any peace process human rights and, in particular, women's rights should be respected. Armed groups should respect and accept Afghan constitutional law."

Another man from Waras District, Bamyan province agreed, stating:

"We must not allow either women's rights or human rights to be victimised [as part of any peace process]."

In Takhar province, Afghan men, women and youth discussed the need for women to be provided with more job opportunities, and proposed increased representation of women in the judiciary, as well as in other employment sectors at the local government level, considering women to be less susceptible to corruption. A male university student from Taloqan city in Takhar province explained:

“Women should be part of all local government departments. Women should join politics and government offices, because women are peacemakers and are less likely to engage in acts of corruption.”

Women in Kabul province expressed concern over proposals to strengthen local *shuras*, the decisions of which, in their view, are based on traditional judgment which often fails to protect women from further violence and serve to discriminate against them. As a student from Gadrez district, Paktya province noted:

“The problem with Mullahs is that they are not familiar with current global developments. In particular, their awareness and interpretation of women’s rights and needs is very low and therefore problematic.”

People from Kapisa province reiterated concerns that the Government must proactively work to raise awareness in communities on harmful traditional practices against women and girls, and on the 2009 law on the Elimination of Violence against Women (EVAW law).¹⁵ In Kapisa, Afghans stressed that police, prosecutors and courts need to work harder to prosecute accused perpetrators of crimes of violence against women, as defined under the EVAW law, which would assist to further legitimise the law’s creation. They also noted problems with the Afghan National Police as it deals with cases of violence against women, suggesting that the Police Family Response Units in Kapisa must be strengthened in terms of capacities of staff and their terms of references.

Overall, Afghans were of the view that any peace process must involve women and not result in the further curtailment of women’s rights. A female schoolteacher in Kandahar province summed up the nation’s widespread frustration:

“Decades of conflict have made Afghanistan evermore male-dominated. Even Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) took advice from his wives. Why won’t our men and rulers today do the same?”

3.4 Realising Equitable Social and Economic Development and Empowering Youth

Throughout the People’s Dialogue, Afghans universally viewed tangible progress in economic and social development, including concerted efforts towards strengthening the education system, creating employment opportunities and ensuring equitable access to development, as crucial to sustainable peace. A majority of participants stated that despite some clear improvements, achievements have not

¹⁵ See *Law on the Elimination of Violence against Women*, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 1 August 2009 [hereinafter “EVAW law”]. Article 5 of the EVAW law lists 22 acts the commission of which constitute violence against women: rape; forced prostitution; setting into flames, using chemicals or other dangerous substances; publicizing the identity of a victim in a damaging way; forcing a woman to commit self-immolation; causing injury or disability; beating; selling and buying women for the purpose of or under pretext of marriage; *baad* (giving a woman or girl in settlement of a dispute); forced marriage; prohibiting the choice of a husband; marriage before the legal age; abuse, humiliation or intimidation; harassment or persecution; forced isolation; forced drug addiction; denial of inheritance rights; denying the right to education, work and access to health services; forced labour; and marrying more than one wife without observing Article 86 of the Civil Code. Article 2 lists as the law’s objectives “fighting against customs, traditions and practices that cause violence against women contrary to the religion of Islam” and “preventing and prosecuting violence against women.”

been equal to the billions of dollars in donor aid that has been spent over the last 12 years. Men, women and youth nationwide stressed that progress should not be measured in terms of the quantity of services, such as the number of schools and hospitals built, but should also be based on the quality of these critical services, which many people viewed as far from satisfactory. A female human rights activist in Farah province reflected on how the lack of social and economic development in Farah contributes to insecurity and instability:

"In this province and in particular in the districts, the birth rate is high while the population only has access to weapons; they have no access to education, health services, and lack water and food security. What do you expect from such a generation except violence and conflict? The Taliban and other armed groups can easily use them as free human resources for their own goals and objectives."

Fostering the Creation of Employment Opportunities

Afghans were of the general consensus that more employment opportunities, particularly for youth, would have a lasting impact on peace and stability in their provinces. They highlighted that sustainable investment in the agricultural sector such as land extension and sufficient irrigation systems would improve rural economies. Furthermore, people explained that private and Government owned enterprises such as textile production, carpet production, resin cleaning, oil production and dairy factories could also create employment opportunities if they received adequate Government support. As noted by a truck driver from Pasaband district, Ghor province:

"Lack of Government attention paid to people's economic issues increases instability. If the Government were to pay attention to people's economic and other challenges, we would see a decrease in instability."

A representative of the Haj and Awqaf department in Parwan province echoed:

"One of the causes of conflict is unemployment and the lack of factories in Parwan. During the Mujahidin period there were two large textile factories in Jabulseraj district, but they're gone now. Creating employment opportunities for the people is extremely important and would have a strong impact on ending the on-going conflict; once people have a salary and can financially support their loved ones, they would not join armed groups. Unfortunately, the Government does not pay attention to this problem."

Strengthening the Education System

Afghan men, women and youth pointed out the need for the Government to establish a more functional and efficient education system, both in terms of infrastructure and quality of lessons, which they strongly asserted must remain at the fore of the Government's and international community's priorities. Afghans reiterated that more adequate educational infrastructure would help to accommodate additional students and, in so doing, tackle the problem of overcrowding in schools.

Ensuring a sounder quality of education was said to require efforts towards building the capacity of teachers and adopting curricula more specific to the context and capacity of students.

A man from Yawan district, Badakhshan province explained the need for better education in his province:

“Education enlightens people and leads to professions so people can earn for their families. In our village, thousands of young men are unemployed . . . The Government should provide technical and professional skills to these young men . . .”

Moreover, corruption within the Afghan education system was viewed by many participants as a related obstacle. As a local man from Murdain district in Jawzjan province noted:

“Intelligent, graduated students came to the capital of Jawzjan to sit the exam to be recruited as teachers in their villages, but they failed the exam while lazy students passed and were recruited and sent to our villages. Imagine what our children will learn from these people? Actually, it is due to bribery that these lazy teachers are recruited.”

A female university lecturer summarised participants' views:

“Strong investment in the education system . . . will bring lasting peace.”

Providing Equitable Access to Development Assistance

Afghans noted that a large portion of communal disputes often arise around issues concerning uneven access to development assistance. Afghan men, women and youth believe that citizens are all equally entitled to benefit from development assistance regardless of their ethnicity, political connections, links with Government, geographic location or existence of conflict in their respective regions.

A local Journalist from Nurgaram district, Nuristan stated:

“There is no development investment in Nuristan. It has been isolated for many years. Instead, it is [the Government's] enemies that pay special attention to Nuristan.”

People saw most inter- and intra-communal disputes could be resolved should the Government and international donors take responsible measures to ensure more equal distribution of development assistance. Throughout Afghanistan, participants emphasised the use of countrywide assessments to monitor development projects as way to increase the effectiveness of development assistance.

Overall, Afghans offered few concrete proposals on how sustainable development could be achieved in their regions. However, due to the agrarian character of many Afghan provinces, a number of participants believed that development aid should be directed towards the construction of hydro-electric water dams, which they stated would assist in combatting draught, foster job creation and provide a steady supply of power to their provinces.

A Bar Association member from Faryab explained:

“Within the last decade the Government has done little work on infrastructure projects. Instead of completing water dams we buy electricity from neighbouring countries. Rather than working on the mechanisation of agriculture we import wheat from abroad. These gaps in the central Government's strategy and planning negatively impact on the lives of ordinary people.”

A community member from Panjshir province echoed the suggestion to construct a dam, noting:

“We have good resources and opportunities but the Government needs to give priority to our neglected province; for example, a hydro-electric dam established along the Panjshir River could contribute to changing people’s lives by providing electricity throughout the province.”

4. Means for Achieving Durable Peace

The Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace contains 33 recommendations to the Government of Afghanistan, the armed opposition, the international community and Afghan civil society on steps needed to achieve lasting peace in Afghanistan. The recommendations of the 4,648 Afghan men, women and youth involved in (phase II) of the Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace have been expanded into provincial road maps for peace. Thirty (30) road maps have been completed to date.

Afghan men, women and youth nationwide urged national and international policymakers at all levels to promptly and adequately address the root-causes of conflict and promote sustainable peace through focus on the following 10 identified priorities:

Afghan People's 10-Point Road Map for Peace

i) Promote Responsive State Institutions

- Rampant corruption within local government institutions (police, prosecution departments and judiciary) and parliament requires stronger checks and balances to improve oversight of these institutions.
- Reform programmes need to be implemented, including independent and non-political measures to remove corrupt Government officials, enhanced training and capacity building initiatives for local government employees, ensuring transparent and merit-based appointments of local government employees with priority given to eligible candidates from provinces where the post is located, and introducing more efficient administrative procedures.
- A performance-based system should be introduced with rewards (*makafat*) and punishments (*majazat*) that would recognise well-performing officials and reprimand those engaged in corruption.

ii) Strengthen Security Institutions

- The Government's limited reach was viewed as a main factor in the Government's lack of authority over territory and its inability to peacefully manage local conflicts. Afghans in general acknowledged progress on reforming and strengthening the Afghan national security forces (ANSF) and reported a high-level of confidence in the Afghan National Army. Afghans repeatedly raised serious complaints, however, about criminal and abusive behaviour, including gross violations of human rights, by the Afghan National Police, Afghan Local Police and pro-Government militias.
- To build effective, responsive and democratic security forces, the People's Dialogue proposed establishing and expanding the functions of security institutions.
- Afghans asserted the need for continued international support to professionalize and build a community-responsive ANSF, and stressed the need for continuous support and cooperation in equipping and training the ANSF to strengthen ANSF capacity which was viewed as vital to maintaining security after withdrawal of international military forces at the end of 2014.
- To build confidence in the ANSF, people proposed the establishment of an effective oversight mechanism with local communities empowered and enabled to report human rights violations by the ANSF with unlawful actions investigated and punished.

iii) Disarm and Disempower Illegal Armed Groups and Other Pro-Government Militias

- Afghans emphasised the imperative to end the illegitimate influence of local powerbrokers and warlords over local government institutions. This action, people asserted, would in turn strengthen peace and stability at the district-level. Afghans throughout the country strongly sought re-introduction of the Disarmament of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG) programme, launched by the Government in June 2005 and ended in March 2011.
- Afghans stressed that opium poppy cultivation, drugs smuggling and illegal extortions by drug-traffickers have sustained or exacerbated the conflict in many areas. People stated that revenues generated from cultivation, processing, and trafficking of opium poppy, as well as drug addiction, directly benefitted insurgent groups and local militias. People blamed these groups for contributing in a direct way to further destabilisation and insecurity in remote areas where the illicit economy thrives.
- Afghans called on the Government to prioritise eradication of the illicit drugs trade and the revenues it generates by strategically locating Afghan national security forces in areas where the drugs trade flourishes to curb insurgent activities and disempower illegal armed groups.

iv) Promote Human Rights, Rule of Law and Tackling Impunity

- Afghans strongly advocated that the Government and international community should take practical steps to ensure the safety and security of civilians during armed counterinsurgency operations and protect their basic human rights in that context. Afghans were very vocal in their desire for stronger rule of law, transparent, accountable and efficient State institutions, and an end to Afghanistan's legacy of impunity.
- The overwhelming majority of Afghans involved in the People's Dialogue suggested that reforming law enforcement and the judicial system must remain at the centre of any efforts to establish durable peace. They proposed vetting of key justice sector personnel, developing and enforcing comprehensive laws and institutional and procedural changes aimed at combatting corruption and abuse of authority in justice sector institutions, along with adequate oversight to ensure the independence of justice institutions.

v) Promote Women's Rights and their Role in Peacebuilding

- Nationwide, people called for urgent action by the Government and international community to implement measures which would end the negative impact of harmful traditional practices on women's rights, and allow women to participate meaningfully in all peacebuilding initiatives.
- Afghans called on the Government to work proactively to raise awareness in all communities on harmful practices against women and girls, and work to fully implement the 2009 law on the Elimination of Violence against Women (EVAW law). Many Afghans agreed *"we must not allow either women's rights or human rights to be victimised"* (as part of any efforts to secure peace).

vi) Enable Youth through Fostering Job Creation and Strengthening the Education System

- Afghans noted with huge concern that the Taliban and other armed groups are easily able to recruit disenchanted youth who struggle to otherwise find meaningful employment. People stressed the need for specialised skills training centres and a robust job creation process including increased investment into construction and development projects which would require human resources.

- Afghan men, women and youth also stressed the need for the Government to establish a more functional and efficient education system for youth which would include more adequate infrastructure and quality of lessons. Afghans reiterated that improved educational infrastructure would help to accommodate additional students.
- Afghans called on the Government to ramp up efforts to reopen schools for girls in those districts where the presence of armed groups has violated Afghan girls' right to education.
- Ensuring a sounder quality of education was also said to require efforts towards building the capacity of teachers and adopting modern curricula, including science and technology, at all levels tailored more specifically to the capacity of students.

vii) Realise Equitable Social and Economic Development

- Afghans all viewed tangible progress in economic and social development, including concerted efforts towards strengthening the education system, creating employment opportunities and ensuring equitable access to development, as crucial to sustainable peace. A majority of Afghan men, women and youth stressed that despite some clear improvements, achievements have not been equal to the billions of dollars in donor aid spent in Afghanistan over the past 12 years. Progress should be measured not only on the quantity of services, such as the number of schools and hospitals built, but on the quality of these critical services.
- Afghans stressed that fostering employment opportunities, particularly for youth is imperative.
- Afghans noted that the persistent lack of equitable and sustainable development has had a particularly severe impact on vulnerable youth and destitute farmers, two segments of society affected by high rates of unemployment and lack of opportunity, illiteracy, susceptibility to drugs and the drugs trade in certain strategic provinces. They called on the Government to focus more proactively on fostering job creation and emphasised development investment in educational facilities for youth as ways to help curb the problem.
- Sustainable investment in the agricultural sector such as land extension and sufficient irrigation systems would also help improve rural economies. Private and Government-owned enterprises such as textile production, carpet production, resin cleaning, oil production and dairy factories could also create employment opportunities if they received adequate Government support.
- Afghans also noted that a large portion of communal disputes often arose around issues concerning uneven access to development assistance. The people highlighted that all Afghan citizens are equally entitled to benefit from development assistance regardless of their ethnicity, political connections, links with Government, geographic location or existence of conflict in their respective regions. Throughout the country Afghans emphasised the use of countrywide assessments to monitor development projects as a way to increase the effectiveness of development assistance.
- Overall, Afghans offered several concrete proposals on how sustainable development could be achieved in their regions. Due to the agrarian character of many Afghan provinces, a number of Dialogue participants stated that development aid should be directed towards the construction of hydro-electric water dams, which they stated would assist in combatting draught, foster job creation and provide a steady supply of power to their provinces.

viii) Ensure Inclusivity in the Peace Process

- Throughout the People's Dialogue, ordinary Afghans consistently emphasised that ensuring wider participation in the peace and reconciliation process – including by men, women, minority groups, civil society and especially youth – is central to its success. People believe increased

participation by these segments of society would better ensure inclusivity and local ownership of the process.

- Many Afghans expressed concern that Afghan youth are not being encouraged to participate in local governance, which they believed also serves to frustrate peace. Greater youth participation could be achieved through the introduction of youth incentive programmes or through recruitment policies specifically aimed at targeting youth.

ix) Strengthen Community-based Dispute Resolution Mechanisms

- Dialogue participants noted that Afghans have a strong culture of addressing conflict and local dispute through people-led councils (*jirgas* and *shuras*). They universally stated that supporting such local conflict resolution mechanisms in a way that serves the community's interests, including those of women and ethnic minority groups, would foster a political and social space in which ordinary people could engage with each other and with conflicting parties in a constructive dialogue for peace.
- A number of Afghans cautioned however that *jirgas* and *shuras* should not serve as forums for adjudication of serious human rights violations or for acts of violence against women.

x) Neutralise Spoilers of Peace

- To address the negative influence of peace spoilers, Afghans strongly advocated for vetting mechanisms based on objective criteria for both ex-armed combatants and leaders of the peace and reconciliation process. Afghans throughout the country believed that those who are involved in the peace process should be honest, influential, well-respected in their communities and democratically elected/appointed. People strongly recommended that those who have been accused of committing war crimes and crimes against humanity should be excluded from the peace process.
- Afghans living in border provinces urged the Government to do more to secure Afghanistan's borders and prevent the infiltration of armed groups into Afghanistan. Afghans reiterated their call for neighbouring governments to cease backing armed groups through the provision of material support (weapons and/or safe havens).

5. Conclusions and People's Recommendations

The Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace (during both phases I and II) has enabled Afghan civil society partners to engage more than 6,000 ordinary Afghan men, women and youth in a national dialogue on peace. Phase I of the People's Dialogue, through soliciting the views of ordinary Afghans on the issues that impact their lives most, including peace and reconciliation, security, rule of law and human rights, and development, aimed to lay the foundations for an inclusive peace process. Phase II focused on building on these foundations by enabling Afghans to develop road maps for peace for their respective provinces.

Phase II of the Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace provided a forum to 4,648 ordinary Afghan men, women and youth to discuss their views on prospects for durable peace in Afghanistan. Participants were encouraged to describe what they perceived to be the primary drivers of local conflict at the district and provincial-levels. Nationwide, the main cause of conflict expressed was the lack of accountability for widespread corruption and abuse of authority by Government officials and/or within Government institutions, including police, prosecution, judiciary and parliament. Nearly all participants voiced their desire to see an end to Afghanistan's legacy of impunity, as well as to bridge the widening gap in trust between the people and their Government.

Many participants also expressed concerns over deteriorating security nationwide which they attributed to a lack of efficient ANSF to combat the proliferation of armed groups, as well as to the premature withdrawal of international military forces. Men, women and youth alike commented on the need for additional ANSF deployment to remote areas and for improved ANSF capacity, but demanded stronger oversight of ANSF actions, which in their view have caused numerous human rights abuses against ordinary citizens and, combined with security concerns, contributed to growing public resentment towards the Government and pro-Government forces.

Participants saw the unfair distribution of resources and unequal delivery of development assistance as tertiary drivers of the conflict, which they believe has aggravated pre-existing factional animosity and inter and intra-communal disputes. Afghan men, women and youth demanded more accountability and transparency on how foreign aid is being distributed and spent, including through effective supervision mechanisms that involve ordinary people in all stages of development planning.

Afghans also saw opium poppy cultivation and the struggle for control over its illicit economy as a grave matter of contention; high rates of unemployment and lack of opportunity, illiteracy, youth's susceptibility to drugs and the influence of armed groups over vulnerable youth and destitute farmers were viewed as contributing factors to the success of the drugs trade in certain strategic provinces. They called on the Government to focus more proactively on fostering job creation and emphasised investment in educational facilities for youth as ways to help curb the problem.

Afghan civil society, acting as representatives of the people, compiled this summary report to ensure that the voices of ordinary Afghan people are amplified. This report represents a call to all policymakers, at the local, national and international levels, to ensure that all peacebuilding initiatives not only meaningfully involve Afghan men, women and youth but are based on the road maps for peace Afghans themselves have envisaged for their provinces. This will not only guarantee the legitimacy of any peace process, but, more importantly, lead to durable peace based on the will of the Afghan people.

Phase II of the People's Dialogue built on the series of steps taken by Afghan civil society to reach out to Afghan people and discuss their views on prospects for peace and the future direction of Afghan society. The 30 provincial road maps produced during phase II include targeted recommendations voiced by Afghans to their Government, the international community, the armed opposition and Afghan civil society.

Based on the local road maps for peace, the Afghan People's Dialogue offers the following recommendations:

Afghan People's Recommendations

To the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

- **Promote an inclusive, democratic and rights-centred peace process** by involving ordinary Afghans, including women, youth, members of ethnic minorities and civil society who will proactively reach out to all communities to ensure the views of all Afghans are incorporated into plans for achieving durable peace and security.
- **Develop and implement the local road maps for peace** produced by ordinary Afghan men, women and youth in line with people's visions for achieving sustainable peace and security, securing social and economic development, and realising human rights and rule of law in their provinces.
- **Support Afghan civil society in its efforts to bridge the widening gap between the Government and the people**, and support civil society programmes aimed at raising awareness on issues related to peace and security.
- **Promote constructive dialogue with the Taliban and other armed groups** through influential *ulema* (religious scholars) and tribal elders to address prevailing insecurity, with a particular emphasis on the protection of civilians during armed conflict based on respect for international humanitarian law.
- **Promote and ensure the protection of human rights and respect for rule of law** as compatible with Afghan values, international legal standards as well as the fundamental tenets of Islam through an increase in comprehensive awareness-raising campaigns for local communities, aimed at alleviating human rights abuses, particularly those committed against women and girls. Strengthen national institutions such as the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) mandated to protect and promote human rights.
- **Implement a holistic approach to transitional justice** which includes prosecutions for perpetrators of crimes committed throughout Afghanistan's conflicts, vetting mechanisms for the employment of administrators and public officials as well as those charged with implementing the peace process, and reconciliation through community-based poverty alleviation and improving conditions of life through economic opportunities.
- **Effectively tackle corruption** through the review, reform, consolidation or disbandment of redundant and ineffective anti-corruption bodies and establish an inclusive and effective anti-corruption taskforce comprised of qualified investigators with requisite oversight powers. Ensure merit-based recruitment of Government officials absent all forms of discrimination,

whether based on tribal affiliation, ethnicity, geographic origin, gender, language, or any other arbitrary basis with an emphasis on hiring trustworthy, qualified and professional Afghans.

- **Conduct a series of effective training programmes** aimed at improving the capacity of Government officials including police, prosecutors, members of the judiciary, parliament and others with a view towards increasing professionalism, honesty, accountability and service delivery at all levels of Government. Promote robust efforts to combat development-related corruption which leads to inequitable distribution of resources, unequal delivery of development assistance and exacerbates inter and intra-communal disputes. Facilitate legal mechanisms which will allow victims and/or their families access to justice and redress.
- **Promote equitable and needs-based development** through sustainable investment in infrastructure and key economic projects in construction, industry, agriculture, public service and other sectors, and implement without further delay suspended development projects specifically in communities with the most pressing development needs, with a particular focus on rural and remote areas. Prioritise equal access nationwide to adequate public utilities and social services such as health and water/sanitation. Focus more proactively on fostering job creation for youth, conducting nationwide literacy campaigns and directing development investment into educational facilities for youth.
- **Strengthen the capacity and expand the presence of the Afghan national security forces (ANSF)** so that they are accountable and responsive to the needs of all communities. Educate and train ANSF, including both national and local police, with the goal of preventing them from committing human rights abuses, and establish an institutional monitoring body in order to hold accountable, through fair and effective investigations and prosecutions, those ANSF who have carried out grave human rights violations. Educate and train Afghan national security forces to avoid and minimise civilian casualties, and ensure all military operations are based on respect for international human rights and international humanitarian law.
- **Cease reliance on militias and armed groups for national security.** Robustly restart the Disarmament of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG) programme, and adopt well-defined measures to ensure that no militias whether pro-Government or otherwise remain armed. Bring all militia involved in human rights violations to justice.
- **Eradicate the cultivation, trafficking, and sale of opium poppy** by establishing an effective nationwide counter-narcotics plan with a timeline for implementation. Support alternative crop industries and foster work opportunities for farmers and youth involved in the illicit drug economy.
- **Increase efforts to protect and promote the rights of women.** Promote the participation of women in public life including in all fora aimed at peacebuilding. Appoint women to key government posts, in the judiciary and on decision-making bodies. Train all *ulema* (religious scholars) and other opinion formers on the negative impact of harmful practices, and ensure they recognise and respect women as values compatible with the rights and duties promulgated by Islam.
- **Educate and train police, prosecutors and members of the judiciary on the 2009 law on the Elimination of Violence against Women** and ensure that the law is ratified by parliament, with a view towards developing more concerted and proactive efforts to bring perpetrators of violence against women to justice.

To the International Community

- **Support the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to implement the recommendations highlighted above** in order to bridge the widening gap between the Government, international community and the people.
- **Support initiatives aimed at ensuring that the voices of Afghan men, women and youth, are heard** and reflected in all decision-making processes. Support programmes aimed at soliciting the views and opinions of ordinary Afghans whose interests and needs must form the basis of any national road map towards peace. Support the greater representation of women in all decision-making bodies established to promote and support durable peace in Afghanistan.
- **Support the Government in developing one clear vision/ road map** to secure peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan which all members of the international community involved in Afghanistan adhere to, absent competing interests or agendas.
- **Support Afghan civil society to bridge the gap between the Government, international community and the people** through support to civil society programmes aimed at raising awareness on issues related to peace and security, including human rights, women's rights and the rights of ethnic minorities.
- **Support the protection of civilians** and encourage the Government in its efforts to ensure protection in line with international human rights and humanitarian law, including in any future training and capacity-building support to Afghan national security forces. Ensure all international military operations are in line with international humanitarian law and are receptive to Afghan sensibilities and cultural values. All affected civilians must be offered appropriate redress, including guarantees of non-repetition, compensation, apologies, investigations, and other tangible measures of recognition. Compensation should be provided promptly, uniformly and systematically to all civilian victims of conflict-related violence.
- **Promote equitable and needs-based development.** Ensure that donor aid reaches intended beneficiaries; fund programmes focusing on rural and remote areas; ensure that aid does not have unintended consequences such as fuelling conflicts or ethnic divides; measure aid effectiveness in terms of quality of service provision, not just quantity; focus on community-based development, focused on the needs of the people; ensure, through appropriate mechanisms, that donated funds are not misused and that all those found to be misusing or misappropriating funds face criminal sanction and are relieved of their posts.
- **Support the Government to ensure that there is no regression in human rights gains.** Monitor all peace initiatives to ensure that gains made in human rights, including the rights of women, are upheld and that human rights are not the casualty of any initiatives aimed at achieving sustainable peace in Afghanistan.
- **Support a rights-based peace process** to ensure that all individuals involved in building peace are the legitimate representatives of all communities, including women, and are neutral and independent individuals who have not been responsible for grave violations of human rights. In line with international standards, ensure that no amnesty is offered to perpetrators of war crimes, crimes against humanity and/or gross violations of human rights.

To the Armed Opposition

- **Enter into direct negotiations with the Government of Afghanistan** aimed at achieving durable peace including between the Government and the Taliban.
- **Ensure the protection of civilians** through respect for international humanitarian law and by ceasing immediately the targeting of civilians, residential areas, places of worship, schools and hospitals and the use of indiscriminate means and methods of warfare including improvised explosive devices.
- **Respect the human rights of all Afghans**, particularly the universal right to education for boys and girls equally, as well as the rights of women and girls.
- **Consider the concerns, grievances and aspirations of all of Afghanistan's people**, including all ethnic and religious groups, men, women and youth.
- **Cease immediately any support to and direct participation in the illicit drug economy.**

To Afghan Civil Society

- **Act as a bridge between the Government and the people** – develop programmes aimed at raising awareness on issues related to peace and security, including human rights (women's rights, and the rights of ethnic minorities); initiate programmes aimed at soliciting the views and opinions of ordinary Afghans and support initiatives aimed at building local capacities.
- **Amplify the voice of ordinary Afghans** by ensuring that the views of men, women and youth are regularly communicated and reflected in initiatives and forums aimed at achieving lasting peace in Afghanistan, and that local road maps for peace developed by the people serve as blueprints for the future vision of the country.
- **Advocate for the protection of civilians** to ensure that all parties to the conflict adhere to international humanitarian law.
- **Support the Government to ensure that there is no regression in human rights gains.** Monitor all peace initiatives to ensure that gains made in human rights, including the rights of women are upheld and protected. Ensure, through targeted advocacy interventions, that human rights are not the casualty of any initiatives aimed at achieving sustainable peace in Afghanistan.
- **Monitor and advocate for a rights-based peace process** and support advocacy initiatives to ensure that all individuals involved in building peace are the legitimate representatives of all communities, including women, and are neutral and independent individuals who have not been involved in any of Afghanistan's conflicts. Support advocacy initiatives to ensure that, in line with international standards, there is no amnesty for war crimes, crimes against humanity or gross violations of human rights.
- **Support regional peace-building initiatives** – initiate greater cooperation and advocacy efforts with civil society at the region-level to build an effective regional network; support an exchange of views whereby people's concerns, grievances and aspirations are communicated at a regional level



AFGHAN PEOPLE'S
DIALOGUE ON PEACE
BUILDING THE FOUNDATIONS
FOR AN INCLUSIVE
PEACE PROCESS

— *Local Road Maps for Peace* —

