

Afghanistan: Pathways to Peace activities

December 2009 – June 2010

The Afghanistan: Pathways to Peace project, cosponsored by the Group of 78, promotes and supports civil society-led approaches to reconciliation and peacebuilding in Afghanistan. A first phase of activities, largely funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, took place between December 2009 and June 2010.

The Department of Peace Studies at Kabul University carried out field research to analyze underlying grievances and potential remedies and solutions. Focus group discussions and 453 interviews were held in 12 provinces and in Kabul. Findings indicate that issues of fairness in access to power, resources, and redress for past crimes and injustices between identity groups (based on ethnicity, religion, age, gender, and place of residence) are central to the conflict, although the causes of the conflict are not limited to them. While there was some consensus on aims, there are vastly differing interpretations as to how they should be approached (e.g. liberal democratic rule of law vs. torture and death penalties).

Research Symposium

A symposium entitled “Coordinating Peace Efforts in Afghanistan” was held in Kabul in January 2010 to discuss ongoing civil society activities in the area of peacebuilding and reconciliation and to identify potential synergies and areas of collaboration. The event brought out the participants’ desire for peace, including by means of dialogue with insurgents, and their concerns with the interference of international actors -- both neighbouring and Western. Speakers pointed to the need for a coherent peace policy and improved coordination among civil society engaged in peacebuilding and between government and civil society efforts. The need for human rights protection and transitional justice were also stressed, as was the requirement to address poverty and unemployment and to provide wider access to quality education.

National Peace Conference

A national peace conference, “A Common Voice for Peace and Reconciliation,” was held in Kabul in April 2010 to examine what was meant by a comprehensive peace process and to develop civil society values and potential activities that would contribute to such a process. Participants – a total of around 160 Afghan men and women from across the country

Peace Conference Main Conclusions

Five core values on which peace should be built in Afghanistan:

- Accountability and transparency
- Inclusivity: All sectors of society need to be involved (men, women, young, old, all ethnic and major tribal groups)
- Transitional justice and rejection of impunity
- Trust-building
- Nation-building & national unity

Areas for further action:

- Establish a mechanism to coordinate peacebuilding initiatives and activities on three levels: within civil society; between civil society and government; between civil society and the international community
- Monitoring of peacebuilding processes
- Training and preparation of future leaders
- Public outreach and awareness raising (e.g. through media)
- Further research on issues central to peacebuilding

and representing a wide range of organizations, ethnicities and interests -- emphasized the following: inclusivity, transparency, trust building, truth telling and justice, the development of functional conflict-resolution mechanisms and a long-term, comprehensive approach.

Frustration with the behaviour of international forces and civilian deaths were frequently raised, as was concern about the damaging role of neighbouring countries; yet, there was agreement that the solution to Afghanistan's problems fundamentally lay with Afghans. There was a call for similar consultations to be held in the provinces since "Afghanistan is not just Kabul."

Following the conference, participants held a round table discussion with senior media representatives on the potential role of the media in a peace process and briefed international diplomats on the Afghan views that had emerged from the conference.

Phase Two Activities

Building on the activities and findings of Phase One, Pathways to Peace proposes a number of activities, including:

1. Establishment of coordinating mechanism for Afghan civil society efforts for peacebuilding, reconciliation and dialogue.
2. Government/civil society peacebuilding consultations
3. Civil society conferences and consultations outside Kabul..
4. Capacity building activities adapted to the socio-cultural context of Afghanistan.
5. Research: Concurrently with the development of the coordinating mechanism for peace, reconciliation and dialogue, policy-oriented research will be carried out.
6. Establishment of a research clearing house at Kabul University..
7. An unofficial policy dialogue process involving persons who can speak for key stakeholders.
- 8.** Communication with policy-makers and the general public Afghanistan to make the case for support for more effective peacebuilding, reconciliation, and dialogue in Afghanistan.

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