

Afghanistan: PATHWAYS TO PEACE



**Afghanistan: Pathways to Peace
Phase One Summary
December 2009 – June 2010**



About the Pathways to Peace process

Afghanistan: Pathways to Peace is a partnership among Afghan and international civil society organizations intended to build Afghan civil society capacity for peacebuilding, reconciliation and dialogue. The Pathways to Peace process is supported by an international consortium of organizations working for peace and reconciliation, including: National Centre for Policy Research, Kabul University; the Afghan Civil Society Forum (ACSF); CARE Canada and CARE International, Afghanistan; the Women Activities & Social Services Association (WASSA); Cooperation for Peace and Unity (CPAU) Afghanistan; Peacebuild: The Canadian Peacebuilding Network; the 3D Security Initiative, Washington, D.C.; Concordis International, Cambridge, U.K.; The Group of 78, Ottawa; Project Ploughshares, Waterloo, Canada; and MATCH International.

Internationally, the initiative has the support of the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) and the Alliance for Peacebuilding (AfP).

We gratefully acknowledge the funding support for the first phase of the process provided by the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade and CARE Canada.

Publications

Phase One Summary Report

- ❖ *Afghanistan: Pathways to Peace: Phase One Summary*

Field Research

- ❖ *Rebuilding Trust in a Divided Society: Survey and Focus Group Results, Department of Peace, National Centre for Policy Research, Kabul University*

Background Papers

- ❖ *Afghanistan: Key Grievances and Suggested Solutions, Silke Reichrath*
- ❖ *Afghanistan, ISAF, and Conditions for Effective Multilateral Peace Support Operations, Ernie Regehr*

Policy Briefs

- ❖ *Policy Brief 1: Elements of Effective Peace Process, Lisa Schirch*
- ❖ *Policy Brief 2: Inclusivity in Peace Processes, Lisa Schirch*
- ❖ *Policy Brief 3: Incentives for Peace Processes, Lisa Schirch:*
- ❖ *Policy Brief 4: Structuring Public Participation in Official Peace Processes, Lisa Schirch:*
- ❖ *Policy Brief 5: External Support for Peace Processes, Lisa Schirch*
- ❖ *Policy Brief 6: A Team Approach, David Lord, Lisa Schirch, Peter Dixon*

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Introduction

The Afghanistan: Pathways to Peace project has taken on the challenge of promoting and supporting civil society-led approaches to reconciliation and peacebuilding in Afghanistan. The objectives of the initiative are:

- to promote, support and inform Afghan-led initiatives for future official and unofficial peace processes at community, national and regional levels;
- to establish a civil society platform for peacebuilding and reconciliation in Afghanistan;
- to carry out practical research to identify options to address substantive and process-related conflict issues; and
- to communicate with and influence policy-makers in support of peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts in Afghanistan. The process will promote and facilitate a broad and inclusive dialogue, both in terms of participation and the substantive issues covered, and will allow parties to the conflict and affected groups to voice their grievances and concerns and to explore potential solutions in a safe environment.

After 18 months of planning and preparation, a first phase of activities, largely funded by the Canadian Government through the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, took place between December 2009 and June 2010. Below is a summary of Pathways activities in the first phase of the initiative.

Research activities

To analyze grievances motivating people to engage in violent conflict and potential remedies and solutions, the Department of Peace Studies at Kabul University carried out field research involving focus group discussions and 453 interviews in 12 provinces and in Kabul. Desk research produced by a number of other project partners helped deepen understanding of underlying issues inherent in peace processes and provide options for participants in the Pathways process.

Regarding the field research, initial 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 conflict are not limited to them. More specifically, the following needs were identified:

Some field and focus group research highlights...

“... The most significant present-day injustices experienced by respondents were the misuse of power by spoilers (warlords), ethnic and linguistic discrimination, and the killing of Pashtun civilians in the South. The emphasis on the spoilers and warlords may have been due to the urban bias; urban Afghans support human rights, including women’s rights, more strongly. The issue of the “killing of the Pashtuns” represented a strong feeling among the Pashtuns, especially those who live in the South and East.”

“... Assertions were made frequently that the source of conflict and perceived injustice had been, at least in part, outside Afghanistan. Conflict originated with or was increased by the two main neighbouring countries, Iran and Pakistan, who pursued their interests, whether these were driven by fear or by hegemonic aspirations.”

“Many Afghans, regardless of whether they are Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek, Turkmen, Pashai, Nooristani, Aymaq, Qezelbash or Arab, and whether they are Sunni, Shiite or Wahabi, share... the memory and trauma of both real and perceived injustice, of mutual and/or one-sided victimization, and of major and long-lasting abuse and suffering.”

“Peace efforts are needed to promote mutual understanding and empathy and to provide opportunities for members of different ethnic groups to seriously listen to the grievances, wishes and proposed solutions of other groups.”

- the reconciliation of multiple versions of history;
- a more balanced distribution of power between the centre and the peripheries;
- more effective responses to corruption and drug-related crime;
- a strong, independent and ethnically-balanced government;
- punishment of war crimes through transitional justice processes;
- trust-building;
- official status for additional languages;
- a census investigating the ethnic composition of the country; and
- respect for women’s rights.

Desk research provided background for team members and for participants in workshops and conferences as they took place. A foundational piece was Peter Dixon’s analysis of *Civil Society and a Comprehensive Peace Process*. “However civil society is defined, the benefits of its involvement in peace processes seem clear. Non-combatants have a legitimate interest in the outcome of a peace process and should arguably have a voice in it. Moreover, a political settlement may not produce a sustained end to the fighting without the broader society’s endorsement and commitment.” Ernie Regehr contributed a backgrounder titled *Afghanistan, ISAF, and Conditions for Effective Multilateral Peace Support Operations*, focused on the role and effectiveness of international military forces in support of peace processes, but also on better understanding the obstacles to success in Afghanistan. “...A primary lesson learned through efforts to end and prevent

armed conflict, thus setting the stage for sustainable peace, is that security operations and peacebuilding need to be pursued simultaneously, but separately.” In her paper on *Afghanistan: Key Grievances and Suggested Solutions*, Silke Reichrath further developed recommendations by Afghan civil society networks for addressing the national conflict and other factors emphasized in the literature as conditions necessary to advance towards peace.

Other tools developed for workshops, conferences and wider dissemination were six concise policy briefs produced by Lisa Schirch, with inputs from members of the Pathways team. The first set out *Elements of Effective Peace Processes*, primary among those elements the need for, “ ... A multi-leveled, sequential process where there are forums for both private, top-level negotiation, middle-level consultations and problem-solving workshops, and public, grassroots dialogue forums for everyone to have an opportunity to assess the root causes of the conflict and propose creative options for addressing these problems.” A second briefing note looked at issues related to *Inclusivity in Peace Processes*, and a third sketched some *Incentives for Peace Processes*. A fourth note on *Structuring Public Participation in Official Peace Processes* summarized five broad models of public participation in peace processes. A fifth looked at *External Support for Peace Processes*. The sixth note, *A Team Approach to Supporting Peace Processes*, pointed out that, “A group that works together to sustain and further a process towards sustained peace with justice, even if not formally or officially appointed, can be a powerful aid to the success of the process.”

Coordinating Peace Efforts Symposium

A symposium titled “Coordinating Peace Efforts in Afghanistan” was held in Kabul in January 2010 to: bring together governmental, non-governmental and social groups that engage in advocacy for peace, conduct research on peace and conflict-related issues, and provide peace education; identify gaps in policy, programming and research, as well as opportunities for coordination and cooperation; and to share international experiences and lessons learned with participants.

The symposium brought together representatives of a range of organizations, among them the National Security Council of Afghanistan, the Afghan Civil Society Forum, Institute of Regional Studies, Sanayee Development Organization as well as members of the Pathways to Peace Steering Committee -- Nicole Birtsch, Head of the Peace Studies Department at Kabul University; Peggy Mason, Peacebuild; Gerry Ohlsen, Peacebuild; and Ernie Regehr, of Project Ploughshares.

Among the presentations, Abdul Ghafoor Liwal, President of the Center for Regional Studies, provided an analysis of the conflict and of options for peace, arguing that the people of Afghanistan were the ones losing out if the warring parties continued the armed conflict, regardless of which side won in combat. Liwal emphasized it was self-evident that coordination of peace efforts was essential, and classified peace supporters in three categories: peace ‘thinkers’ such as scholars and analysts, who provided technical insights into the causes and potential solutions; peace ‘doers’ or practitioners, like the tribal and social councils, civil society, and political parties; and international stakeholders, including neighbouring countries, who had their role to play in bringing peace.

The event underscored 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 were 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. Speakers presented the Phase One research findings and insights from Ireland, Sudan, and other comparative peace processes. Participants – a total of around 160 Afghan men and women from across the country and representing a wide range of organizations, ethnicities and interests -- stressed the following:

- any peace process must be inclusive of all sectors of society, including tribal and religious leaders, NGOs, moderates and radicals, women and youth;
- transparency is essential, including transparency about any government negotiations with the armed opposition;
- peacebuilding requires trust-building, not only between former adversaries but also trust in the peacebuilding process;
- trust-building requires the provision of opportunities for truth-telling and justice for perpetrators of serious crimes and human rights violations;
- functional local conflict-resolution mechanisms need to be developed or improved upon by building on existing traditional councils where these have been functional, legitimate, and in keeping with the rule of law and human rights; and
- peacebuilding is a long-term, comprehensive process, not a project; it is broader, deeper and longer-lasting than just ‘official’ negotiations with insurgents.

Aziz Rafiee, Director of the Afghan Civil Society Forum, argued that to achieve both justice and stability, civil society had to play a central role in building peace in the country. This required enhancing its peacebuilding skills and building a culture of patience. Rafiee noted that all sides of the conflict were tired of war and deprivation; that Afghans abroad wanted to return to Afghanistan because they were tired of being immigrants in other countries; that Afghanistan enjoyed freedom of speech and of the media, which enabled people to access information about other parts of Afghanistan; that many Afghans were willing to build a social consensus and to speak and be heard; that Afghanistan had a new Constitution based on the principles of equality and justice; and that the international presence in Afghanistan provided a “golden opportunity” for Afghans to build their country, despite the challenges associated with this presence.

On the negative side of the equation, obstacles included the lack of trust between the people and the government; the lack of an effective social security system; deep ethnic and tribal divisions that affect public policies, employment opportunities, social services, language rights, and education; and the impunity among leaders with a history of violence and human rights violations. A national strategy was needed to address these challenges, with an emphasis on equality, justice, accountability, peace and prosperity.

Abdul Ghafar of the Sanayee Development Organization considered “Peace [as] the distance between two wars.” To increase this distance and contribute to a long period of peace he said that an honest acceptance of guilt was needed on the part of those who had committed crimes and caused suffering.

Secondly, a determined commitment was required to ending conflict and violence. Third, justice had to prevail, and properties taken through violence and illegally had to be returned (e.g. land). And finally, a culture of equality and respect for everyone had to be built, going beyond ethnic prejudices. Through these principles, reconciliation could be achieved between the parties in conflict, and bridges built between communities.

Liah Ghazanfar Jawad, Deputy Director of the Foundation of Solidarity for Justice, spoke on behalf of the victims of 30 years of war. Innocent individuals and civilians continued to be killed by all sides of the conflict, including by international forces. And yet, the government had given warlords amnesty and struck backdoor deals with them. This was wrong. In such circumstances, justice did not mean anything,



particularly without the participation of the victims. The voices of victims had to be raised through the media, in their own words and sharing their stories of pain. Jawad showed the audience publications that gathered hundreds of stories of victims. These needed to be documented systematically; otherwise no one would hear the victims' voices. Ninety percent of victims demanded justice and considered

peace without justice as meaningless. She suggested that victims should decide the fate of warlords, not the government. Instead, the government should facilitate the process and provide a mechanism to ensure that such justice took place. Past impunity had allowed those who had not faced justice to kill again. This cycle had to be broken.

In the course of the conference there was a call for similar consultations to be held in the provinces since "Afghanistan is not just Kabul." Other suggestions included:

- improved coordination within civil society and between civil society, government and the international community;
- further research on the causes of the Afghan conflict;
- supporting alternatives to the Peace Jirga;
- reaching out to communities, young people, elders, mullahs and other leaders;
- monitoring key issues and human rights concerns to help ensure they are not ignored in the peace process;
- training future leaders;
- media training and strengthening the Faculty of Journalism at Kabul University to harness the positive potential of the media for peacebuilding; and
- public outreach and awareness raising on peacebuilding issues.

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.

Main Conclusions of the conference

Based on the results of the eight working groups, as well as the three days of intense discussions on peacebuilding by civil society representatives from Kabul, from a number of Afghan provinces, and from international civil society, the following consensus emerged on the **core values** around which peace should be built in Afghanistan:



1. **Accountability and transparency.**

It is of vital importance that information is shared about the peace process if it is to be considered acceptable by the population, and if it is to be successful in the long run. Governments negotiating peace with opponents should inform the population about who they are speaking with and what the key issues are.

2. **Inclusivity.** All sectors of society must be involved in peacebuilding: men, women, young and old, all major ethnic and tribal groups. Without such inclusivity, the peace process will not be considered legitimate by all segments of the population and will therefore not lead to lasting peace.

3. **Transitional justice and rejection of impunity.** There is much frustration within civil society that certain individuals who have committed serious human rights violations are enjoying impunity, benefiting from their criminal gain, and even participating in government. In peacebuilding, peace is one side of the coin, while justice is the other.

4. **Trust building.** Trust is situated at the heart of peacebuilding. There are two aspects to this process. First, all parties must trust the process through which peace is being negotiated, and second, trust must be built between the various communities in conflict. Third-party mediators can play a central role in trust building.

5. **Nation building.** Afghanistan is a land with many regions, languages and identities, but there is an overall sense of being Afghan. Genuine national unity will lead to peace between the various communities and therefore steps must be taken to strengthen such unity. Civil society can play a role in this national process by linking various parts and communities of Afghanistan together.

Certain concrete steps were identified by civil society during the conference that should be the basis of further action. Looking ahead, these five **central activities** were recommended:

1. **Increased coordination.** There are numerous peacebuilding initiatives within Afghanistan at this point, and these may increase in the future. Initiatives and activities undertaken by civil society will benefit from better coordination. Such coordination is required at three levels: first, within civil society; second, between civil society and government; and third, between civil society and the international community.

2. **Monitoring.** In its capacity as “watchdog,” civil society has a crucial role to play in monitoring various peacebuilding initiatives, particularly peace negotiations. Civil society has to ensure that key issues and concerns (e.g. women’s rights, impunity, role of families in ex-combatant integration, etc.) are not ignored in the overall peacebuilding process.
3. **Training and preparation of future leaders.** Peacebuilding is a long-term process, often taking generations. Civil society must be involved in the preparation of future leaders who will champion peace over war.
4. **Public outreach and awareness-raising.** Public education and outreach programs must be developed by civil society in order to inform the wider population about peacebuilding issues. A capable and independent media can play a particularly vital role in this respect. Civil society can contribute to media training and engage journalists on issues related to peacebuilding.
5. **Further research.** Peacebuilding must be informed by realities on the ground; therefore research is of fundamental importance. Accurate information is required to get a deeper understanding of key issues and actors.



Phase Two Activities

Building on the activities and findings of Phase One, Pathways to Peace is pursuing the following lines of development of peacebuilding initiatives in Afghanistan):

1. Support for the establishment of a funded and staffed coordinating mechanism for Afghan civil society efforts for peacebuilding, reconciliation and dialogue.
2. Government/civil society peacebuilding consultations among relevant government officials and civil society representatives, including peace researchers and activists, and representatives from women and youth groups.
3. Civil society conferences and consultations outside Kabul: To fully reflect national concerns, further consultations similar to those undertaken in Kabul in January and April will be carried out in the provinces.
4. Capacity building activities adapted to the socio-cultural context of Afghanistan will be built into the process as it evolves and will be implicit in many of the activities undertaken.
5. Research: Concurrently with the development of the coordinating mechanism for peace, reconciliation and dialogue, policy-oriented research will be carried out.
6. Research clearing house: The consultations held in Phase One identified the need for a clearing house for peace-related research findings.
7. Separate from, but complementary to the development of a public civil society peace coordinating mechanism, an unofficial policy dialogue process will be held.
8. The overall Pathways process will communicate progress and obstacles in Afghanistan to relevant policy-makers and the general public outside Afghanistan to make the case for international support for more effective peacebuilding, reconciliation, and dialogue in Afghanistan. It will also disseminate the views of Afghan civil society on the evolution of peace processes in Afghanistan at the international level.