

October 12, 2020

Michelle Bachelet  
UN High Commissioner for Human Rights  
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights  
Palais Wilson  
52 rue des Pâquis  
CH-1201 Geneva, Switzerland

Your Excellency,

We are writing to express our concerns regarding the intra-Afghan peace process and to solicit your support in advocating for a just, durable and inclusive peace process. We believe that the ongoing peace process must address the concerns and needs of Afghan women, ethnic and religious minorities, war victims, IDPs, refugees and all those affected by the four decades of war.

As leaders of the various civic groups from across the country, we have been at the frontlines of building peace for decades. We know the costs of war firsthand and continue to pay the price daily. As your reports attest, we, the women of Afghanistan, and our families have borne the brunt of war, and have witnessed and lived through the displacement and destruction of our homes and communities.

Even now, as the talks proceed, violence against the population has escalated at alarming rates. While the Taliban honor their commitment to refrain from targeting US soldiers, they target innocent Afghans daily through explosions set in heavily populated areas as well as targeted killings of peace and civil society activists. The fighting on all sides have been inflicting daily injury and death on a population already traumatized for four decades, increased poverty, and the ongoing COVID pandemic. We have no sanctuary and are under siege on our streets, in our homes, workplaces, mosques and schools.

We therefore appeal to OHCHR, the leading entity on the protection and promotion of human rights, to amplify our voices and support our efforts by leading the call to honor the UN Secretary General's appeal for a comprehensive ceasefire. We urge the United Nations to appeal to member states to call on the two sides and their supporters to enact measures to protect civilians' lives and properties. The lives of innocent Afghans should not be a pawn by any side seeking leverage at the negotiating table. In order for Afghans to remain hopeful that peace is imminent, there must be a full and permanent cessation of violence because peace cannot be achieved when there is increased violence while the talks are ongoing.

We also ask for your support in ensuring that the talks are meaningful rather than an exit strategy for some actors. A durable peace in Afghanistan needs more time, patience, and resources.

Additionally, to ensure good order and stability as well as prevent another civil war, the withdrawal of the troops must be responsible and staged.

Today, women in Afghanistan are faced with enormous challenges. We face great threats in every direction—alarming levels of domestic violence, intimidation by emboldened extremists and shrinking domestic and international support. Despite these challenges, we remain resilient and are determined to stand up for our rights and the rights of all Afghans. In order to further improve our roles, we must be given the political support and space to do so through formal mechanisms for the inclusion of women in all phases and tracks of the peace process.

There must also be robust mechanisms to address issues of justice, displacement and the many atrocities that have been inflicted on our people during this long conflict. Afghanistan today has strong women’s organizations, civil society bodies, and advocacy groups who have been advocating for the protection of rights of religious minorities, war victims, and persons with disability and the displaced population. These voices must be accommodated and heard throughout the process to ensure a just peace and to inform strategic implementation, planning, budgeting, and monitoring.

Finally, while we recognize that the Afghan government and the Taliban have opted for direct talks without a facilitator, we believe that the UN still has a fundamental role to play in supporting the establishment of mechanisms to include the voices of Afghan women’s groups, civil society, victims groups, IDPs, refugees, religious and ethnic minorities, and the diaspora.

Thank you for your consideration and your work on behalf of the Afghan people.

For a just and dignified peace,

Afghan Women  
Our Voice-Our Future  
Together Stronger  
Afghan Women’s Network

We are a Coalition of Afghan women, comprised of Afghan women from across the country and outside Afghanistan. The Afghan Women’s Network together with a larger coalition of Our Voices - Our Future and Together Stronger work to achieve peace and demand an end to the conflict and an equal representation of women across fields in Afghanistan. We believe in inclusive, just, practical, and sustainable peace in which women are equal citizens of Afghanistan.