

Afghan Women Six Point Agenda for Moscow Peace Talks:

Afghan women have historically been on the right side of the history. They have consistently sided with democracy and social progress. They have, even when restricted by war and misogyny, taken active part in self-development and the development of the country. They have stood for elections, led ministries, provided bulk of the country's schooling and healthcare, mothered generations well, and they are the ones that have broken taboos through their art and activism – and in doing so they have risked their lives.

Decades of factional wars, the Taliban rule, and the losses sustained during the insurgency and counter-insurgency have left millions of Afghan women widowed, children orphaned, and men disabled. We, Afghan women, believe that no side in these decades of war and conflict are winner, no man should be proud of their legacy obtained through violence. Genuine success is an immediate ceasefire, and those that would make it happen would have something to be truly proud of.

Most important of all, Afghan women have always been peace makers, be it at home, the community and nationally. They have rarely utilised violence to reach their aims, even when they were, in the course of civil war, raped, killed, mutilated and made to leave their homes.

Today, the male Afghan political actors and their international counterparts are talking about negotiating peace in the country. We, women of Afghanistan, are very concerned about this process. Through this statement, we are calling on all Afghan men involved in the peace talks to adhere to the following:

Do not change the political order: The political order, that the post-Taliban democracy has created, has greatly empowered Afghan women. Public institutions have provided employment to women, educated them, given them skills, lowered their mortality rates and have provided them with relative security. Peace negotiated at the cost of the democratic system, or divisions of state institutions such as ministries between different factions will not be acceptable by the women of Afghanistan. Democracy must not be up for negotiation!

Do not compromise law and order: The lawlessness that was created when the Afghan army and police were dismantled in the wake of the Soviet departure in 1989 harmed Afghan women massively. The dissolution of the Afghan armed forces only pleased our adversaries, as Nawaz Sharif famously acknowledged the dissolution of the Afghan armed forces as one of the key achievements of the Pakistani state. Afghan men involved in negotiating peace must be clear that the dissolution of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces is one of the red lines for Afghan women as citizens of Afghanistan, and this red line MUST NOT be crossed.

The ANDSF must not be politicised and it must remain a national institution that contains men and women from all ethnic groups of the country. The present-day Afghan army and police are dedicated, and tax-payers of many nations have invested in giving them skills, their efforts and sacrifices must not be erased.

Bring Afghan women to the table: Some women are involved in the peace talks lately, which we support and see it as part of Afghan women's achievements. However, we want women's representation to be meaningful. There is a strong women's movement in Afghanistan that represents all strata of the society. These women should be involved in the peace talks. Women's involvement in the talks must not be reduced to party politics, it should be a true inclusion.

Do not choose peace without human rights: Afghan women would not accept peace bought at the cost of their hard-gained freedoms. We believe that any peace that threatens Afghan women's rights, freedoms and gains will not be sustainable. Temporary restrictions on women's rights in the name of peace and security is utterly unacceptable. Therefore, on conclusion of any peace agreement, women's rights to life, education, healthcare, freedom of movement, right to engage in political and economic activities and so on must be guaranteed.

Be direct about women's rights: It is important that all Afghan men on the negotiating table are vocal about the need for not negotiating away women's rights in any peace process. Afghanistan is an Islamic country and Afghan women live their lives within an Afghan and Islamic culture. There is no need to reinterpret Afghan women's lives. Where reinterpretation is needed is around respect for human life and dignity. You do not have to be a woman to defend women's rights! We are your partners in the development of the country, as such you have to use your male privilege to fight for our interests too.

Do not cut off Afghanistan from the international community: Despite significant progress made in the last fifteen years, Afghanistan remains aid dependent. As a nation we have to eradicate polio, lower maternal mortality further, deal with the repercussions of having the highest population growth rates in the world and manage natural disasters such as the ongoing drought. We need the support of the international community to be able to achieve these goals. Afghanistan has made huge progress in building trade links within and beyond the region. Do not make any compromises that would make future economic sanctions against us a possibility, pushing us further into economic poverty.

We, the women of Afghanistan, believe that our Afghan male allies on the peace negotiation table can work with us to make sure that the peace that we so desperately need can be achieved and sustained. We are looking forward to working within the peace process actively.

Note: This statement is based on the views and opinions of Afghan women from all walks of life, and from both the centre and provinces, urban and rural areas as well as the Diaspora. This statement is facilitated by the Afghan Women's Network. Please contact Mashal Roshan on networking@awn-af.net or ++93 (0) 7777 43024 for media queries.