

Women and peace in Afghanistan: Open Letter from Afghanistan's Civic Groups

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October 21, 2020

From: Women of Afghanistan

To: Civil Society Leaders and Human Rights Defenders in the Region

Subject: Let's Stand Together For Our Common Values and Prosperity

Fellow Leaders of Our Region,

In the last two years, efforts have been underway to end the conflict in Afghanistan with the Taliban. The intra-Afghan talks began on September 12th, raising hopes that we may finally achieve peace. We, the women of Afghanistan*, have been advocating for peace and have been appealing to both sides to commit to a comprehensive ceasefire and end the killings of Afghan citizens. We have also raised our concerns on the recent increase in the targeted killings of our women leaders, public servants, children and civilians. We believe the only way to achieve durable peace is to ensure that any agreement provides for the equal rights of all Afghan citizens, including women and ethnic and religious minorities. Marginalizing and exclusion will only provoke new cycles of violence and conflict, something we have all bore witnesses to in our region.

While we continue our efforts to end the conflict, we cannot achieve this alone. We are writing to you to stand with us in achieving lasting, just, and dignified peace in Afghanistan and the entire region. The Afghan conflict is as much a regional conflict as it is a domestic one. Experience demonstrates that conflicts have regional implications and this is particularly true for our region. In recent decades, we have witnessed the growing extremism and militarization of our region, creating unprecedented challenges to our regional development. Our region has been in turmoil for far too long. Hostilities in our region have undermined our populations' basic human rights and liberties, and most importantly our right to live in peace. As a region, we have some of the world's worst indicators in domestic violence, health care, literacy, violence against women and children, violent extremism, and poverty - all of which are exacerbated by ongoing insecurities.

We are bound together by our shared cultural, economic and political challenges and opportunities but also by our shared fight against extremism. The June 2020 attack on the maternity hospital in Kabul, the April 2019 attacks in Sri Lanka, the December 2014 school massacre in Peshawar, and the November 2008 attacks in Mumbai are just some of the atrocities our citizens have endured. Our regional interdependence, and our joint values of peace and justice means that we must work together and to go beyond the strained politics of our countries. **As members of civic groups, we together can be a critical force in calling for action to end the violence that has been destroying both our and the lives of all our children.** We can also together counter the weaponization of women's rights to advance patriarchal agendas and widespread injustices that

have paralyzed us for decades. We know that if we raise our voices together, our shared experiences of suffering and injustice, and love for our communities will make our voices louder and heard. As members of civic groups, we have a responsibility to hold our leaders accountable and to demand an end to the destruction of our citizens.

Afghanistan is at a crossroads, and we must ensure that the opportunity for peace is not squandered for personal and political interests. Many of your leaders are closely involved in the Afghan peace process and their influence will shape the process. We urge you to add your voice to ours, by holding your leaders accountable and calling on them to play a positive role toward an end to the violence in Afghanistan. Our regional interdependence, and our joint values of peace and justice means that we must work together for the collective benefit and prosperity of all of our citizens.

Together we can change the current course and move towards a prosperous region in which our people enjoy the basic right to live peacefully.

For Peace and Solidarity,

Signed by:

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 an inclusive, just, practical, and sustainable peace in which women are equal citizens of Afghanistan.*
