



## **APT Narrative Report (April – June 2017)**



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## I. General Information

- Name of Organization: Afghans for Progressive Thinking, (APT)
- Website: [www.apr.af](http://www.apr.af)
- Country: Afghanistan

## II. Main Activities

A total number of 1,232 students (396 female, 836 male) participated in the following activities organized by APT in the past quarter:

### **Debate:**

During the past quarter APT organized 41 Dari and English debate training workshops and one debate exhibition in Kabul, Herat, Mazar, Samangan, and Faizabad. Furthermore, APT organized three English and one Dari Debate Tournament in Herat, Faizabad Balkh and Samangan provinces, in which a total of 435 students, male and female from 13 private and public universities participated. The participants debated three preliminary rounds and one final round in two full days.

Some of the debate motions included the following:

- a. This House sees a bright future for Afghanistan where all human beings irrespective of their differences will be living in this land in harmony with each other.
- b. This house would outlaw gender-segregated high schools in Afghanistan.
- c. This House believes that Afghanistan's crisis are rooted in its ethnic clashes.
- d. This House supports the feminist movements in Afghanistan.
- e. This House supports the presence of international armed forces in Afghanistan.
- f. This House supports the achievements of the Afghan National unity government.

Participants debated these motions in a peaceful environment where they were respectful and tolerant to their opponent's ideas and arguments.

The debate on appreciation of diversity was very interesting and also important. Some students said that appreciation for diversity can move a nation forward. This group of students used Western countries and some Asian countries like India as examples of place where diversity is accepted and respected, and their economies are growing. The second group of students argued that Afghans are not yet ready to embrace differences, especially when it comes to difference. This group argued that a lot need to be done to prepare the people in order to promote cohabitation of all kinds of people in one place (Afghanistan).

Likewise, supporting the feminist movements and the presence of international armed forces are complicated topics to discuss in Afghanistan. Some of the youth are more progressive and pro women rights and feminist movements while others see feminism as a western phenomenon which offends the Afghan tradition and Islamic teachings. The pro feminism students argued that women were suffering from different forms of violence for decades, and now is the time to end this. They believe that unless the women stand for themselves, they will be deprived of fair and just human rights. However, those against, believes that feminism is a western phenomenon which does not align with Afghan life style. They believe supporting such ideas will corrupt the social structures and will endanger the families, mostly women themselves.

Similarly, the discussion over the presence of international armed forces in Afghanistan was quite intense. Some youth believe that the presence of these forces undermines the sovereignty of Afghans, and the current security crisis is because of them. They argue that thousands of people have been killed and injured in the past fifteen years and yet security is getting worse. They believe in withdrawal of these forces for a peaceful Afghanistan. On the other hand, some youth believe that the situation before the presence of the international forces was worse than what it is now. They give the example of the Taliban regime when Afghanistan was changed to the nest of international terrorism. They argue that during the Taliban regime, health care, education, transportation, and social life was a mess. They believe the reason Afghanistan now has some form of democracy, elections are held, basic health care is available for the majority of the population, freedom speech exists, education is improving, and people are living free lives is because the international forces helped our government achieve all of these.

APT organizes these debates in order for students to examine different sides of a question. Through these debates, we will pursue our vision for a more inclusive Afghan society where all are respected as long as they do not promote hatred and violence.

### **Leadership:**

In the past quarter, APT organized a 40-hour long leadership development course which took place from April – May 2017. Our leadership program trained 20 students (12 men; 8 women) in Servant Leadership, which focuses not only on the skills of a leader but also on the character of him/her. After completion of the class portion of the course, students practiced their new knowledge and understanding by participating in social service projects. Students were divided into four groups to do their social service project as following:

One group organized an event named “Kind Hands” for street children. Their activities included: music, theater, live singing, painting, life story of children, motivation, and drawing pictures with children and playing games with them. Children enjoyed this work and student leaders were motivated to use their leadership skills to impact the Afghan society for better.

Another group visited a high school and facilitated a session on “Reading Methods”. The group members are committed to continue these kinds of sessions in the future as well.

The third group facilitated a session on “Importance of Having a Vision” for local school children in western Kabul. In this session, children were asked to close their eyes and imagine their vision. Afterward, they were asked to draw their vision in a piece of paper. These children were very smart and their visions included peace, prosperity, development, and green environment in Afghanistan. The work of children inspired our leadership development course participants to commit to working with these children into the future.

The final group decided to raise awareness among public school students about the harms of drugs and opium. They encouraged students to choose a healthy life. This group played and watched “Ryan's Well” video together with school children. The video is about the dream of a Canadian child to provide clean water for other children in Africa. This video inspired Afghan students to have a goal in their life and dream big.

#### **Media:**

APT conducted 15 radio programs on De Rana Pa Latoon, a weekly live radio program that gets broadcast through the Killid Radio every Thursday from 11-11:55am. The sessions are led by Ali Fayez, APT Programs Coordinator, and Akmal Samsor APT's Honorary Member and a new speaker, Huma Azizi, who is a teacher of a public school in Kabul. She will be attending the talk shows every week. APT discussed the below topics in the past quarter.

- How to build one nation in Afghanistan?
- What are the opportunities for nation building in Afghanistan?
- How can we trust in nation building?
- What is the relation between nation building and development?
- What is the role of people in building a nation?
- What is the relation between nation building and the notion of diversity?

#### **International:**

In the past quarter, APT announced a call for applications for this year's exposure trip to India. We received around 80 applications from students across Afghanistan. After reviewing applications and interviewing them, 6 students (4 females, 2 male) from Kabul, Badakhshan, Mazar and Herat provinces were selected based on their qualification and commitments to APT's vision. The trip will take place from 26 September to 3 October 2017.

#### **IV. Context and Impact of Activities**

##### **Broader Context:**

The overall situation of Afghanistan remains complex. Security has certainly deteriorated in the past quarter. The frequency of bombings and the scale of their devastation have grown which has reinforced despair among the public including youth in the past few months. Unemployment rates are high that force young Afghans to immigrate in the hopes of a better life elsewhere. Generally, the low income class seek to immigrate to Iran and Pakistan while the middle-income class make attempts to seek refuge in Europe. Despite the desire of Afghans to immigrate, some countries such as Pakistan, Iran, Germany and other European countries have been forcing Afghans to return to their homeland within or without a bilateral agreement between Afghanistan and their country. It has become hard to convince people that there is still hope. The international community has remained committed to having a presence and helping the Afghan government through 2020. International community pledged \$4.5 billion annually for security and defense forces and \$15.2 billion for political stability and developmental projects. The international back up have helped Afghanistan sustain its current National Unity Government and a functioning civil society despite the existing tensions between the Afghan political elites especially between President Ghani's team, CEO Abdullah Abdullah's faction, and a new emerging Governor Atta's team. These developments have occurred while weak governance that includes existence of widespread corruption and ill-functioning delivery of social services; gross human rights violations; "street courts" to punish women; flight of youth from Afghanistan to European countries; and high rates of unemployment among young people are major problems in the country.

##### **Impact of APT:**

In the face of these events and the current situation of Afghanistan, APT as an organization of young Afghans with a passionate leadership believes there is hope and that the country is moving toward the right direction. Refugees being deported to Afghanistan creates an opportunity for us to work with them and direct their energies toward building our country. Violence is uniting Afghans to collectively stand against it. Political rifts are grouping too many scattered individuals and their followers into unified teams. The young generation, although slowly, is getting involved in leadership positions in the country many of whom include APT members and associates including deputy mayor level, deputy minister level positions, and director level positions across the ministries as well as the Presidential Palace. APT has impacted students and local people directly through its activities in the past quarter. For example, debaters practiced various motions from social and political to economic and cultural motions. In each of these debates, students practiced tolerance and respect. They maintained the expected behavior while disagreeing with other students. Naweed Zahed, a third year Economics student at Borna Institute of Higher Education said: "We were required to listen to critiques and refutations. I had never allowed anyone to talk against me for an entire seven

minutes. I thought its disrespectful to me. Through debating, I learned that keeping calm and listening to criticism and differing opinions is not being submissive but being civic.” Khalida Ahmadi, a senior student of Economics at Badakhshan University told us: “Debate is an amazing experience. Men rarely listen to women’s opinions here. In this tournament, all patriarchal norms were shattered and our arguments were treated equally valuable. I am more confident now and that’s empowering.”

The self-confidence and communication skills of debate clubs developed. Students communicate their thoughts and views with classmates and peers eagerly and with high confidence. Through learning about a topic students also learn about research methods and it improves their learning skills. Ajmal Wafa, an undergraduate student of Business Administration at Kardan University, said, “Since we have started a debate practice once a week in mid-2016 at Kardan Debate Club, I witness its positive effects on my professional life, and especially in university my general information is increased because when we debate we have to research about the motion for several days before our practice”.

The leadership class student was able look to themselves as leaders with peaceful characteristics, explored that conflict is part of their lives so that they could manage and transform the differences in a positive way, discovered that judging upon perception create further conflict, learned about the concept of violence so that could be aware of their selves role in applying violence and discovered the concept of peace with its dimensions.

#### Students’ reflection on Leadership Training Sessions

Students believed that the training and the topics they discussed in the leadership class were relevant to their needs and daily lives. They said they had not studied such relevant topics at the university, but that within a short period of time, they learned a lot at APT. Most importantly, they noticed that at APT ideas are not imposed on them but they are free to think and exchange opinion in a safe environment. Here are some of the things students said after taking the leadership course at APT:

Momina Ahmadi, Philosophy and Sociology student of Kabul University: “I have learned from conflict transformation topic that we are all interconnected in our family, community, society, regional and worldwide levels. If one of us has a problem, it impacts everybody else. So, we need to help each other.

Habibullah Zafari, studying Business Administration at Gawharshad University: “I learned that conflict is part of the life and it is natural, so appreciating the views of others give us comprehensive views. Conflict is bad when it becomes violent. I also discovered we all are leaders as we all think about change. So I try to change myself first and then change others.”

Suraya Azimi: “I was exposed to many good topics, but mainly what I learned from this training is the negotiation skill, unfortunately, it is missing at all levels of family, social and political life in my country. I learned how to negotiate with a win-win situation in my mind rather than being just selfish.”

Sayed Nasrat Shah, studying Law at Mashall University: “Through exercises, I learned we should put ourselves in the situation of others before judging them. I learned it is not always true to see things from the way we look at. It is also important to learn about how others view the world.”

Shahr Banoo: “After my graduation from leadership class at APT, I feel more responsible toward myself, my society and my country.”

It is rewarding for us at APT to promote hope among Afghans at a time when despair prevails everywhere.

## **V. Institutional Developments**

### **New Province:**

APT expanded its operations to Nangarhar province for the first time. Nangarhar is located in eastern Afghanistan and borders with Pakistan. In this context, we will shift conversations toward learning, appreciation of diversity, respect for others, and hope. APT’s project in Nangarhar will train university students in research methodology and debate ethics, and provide opportunities for students to engage in meaningful and constructive discussions. The project will also allow Nangarhari students the opportunity to travel to Kabul and participate in open dialogues with students at Kabul University.

### **Training Materials:**

In addition to publishing a 50-page guideline for debate judges’ guideline in English and Dari, APT developed and distributed a new debate training manual to debate clubs. It includes lessons in three levels of beginner, intermediate, and advanced.

### **Memorandum of Understanding (MoUs):**

APT signed two MOUs with Karwan University in Kabul and with Loqmani-Hakim Institute of Higher Education in Samangan. These MOUs will expand our work at these universities and allow their students to learn nonviolent communication skills. Students at these university will have the opportunity to become part of APT’s vision and promote it in their communities.

## **VI. Success Stories of APT Programs**

### **Debate:**

Fatima Ehsani, studying English Literature at Herat University, shares her debating experience with us:

“When I was at first year of university, I saw the APT page on face book and I really got interested in its programs specially debate and leadership. I was always searching and waiting for an opportunity to attend it. Luckily, in third semester of university the representatives of APT’s office informed us about the debate tournament that would be held amongst different universities of Herat both public and privates. It was a good opportunity that we could use our English skills and further improve our speech and critical thinking power. So I and some of my classmates applied for that. Before the debate tournaments we had our practice debates and trainings that we could know more the APT and also about different aspect of debate. I was really interested with APT programs and plans provided for youths. We passed our debate tournament with a very transparent process which was conducted for about two days. On second day, the finalists were announced and the champions were selected after a debate session. Fortunately I was honored to be chosen as one of the finalists.

During the debates that I attended, I knew many new things that have affected my attitudes towards life. The APT provides opportunities for youth to use their skills and to provoke them activate their hidden skills and potential powers. After working with APT if I compare myself with passed, I have changed a lot. It helped me to improve my critical thinking, power of my speech, communication, brain storming, respecting to my opposite group’s ideas and many other skills.

These debates taught me to be confident enough to criticize logically after I have specified my favor of motion. It helped me practically fortify my attitudes and my team’s based on analytical power I got from debate sessions. In the other hand, I could improve my speaking skill and methods on how to speak between groups of people, how to outline my viewpoints, and how to be logical when I share convincing ideas with fellows.

The other crucial skill I got out of these debate sessions was to be open minded in hearing critical ideas from opponents. I learnt to be patient enough when debating the opposite ideas and to analyze then logically to convince them. I find myself absolutely changed in being more patient, pertaining to analysis and logical critical.

It also helped to communicate easily with my teammates and also opposite sides. In addition it caused me improve my brain storming skill, sometimes we had to be the opposites of our ideas and support the title with the information that we ourselves didn’t like that.

Before attending the training of APT, I used to speak hard to others when they didn’t accept my ideas but now I find it so awkward to impose our ideas without logical discussion. I try to respect ideas of any level but then will convince my opposite side members with soft convincing ideas.

The engagement with APT helped me to improve the above mentioned skills so dramatically not just in academic places but also in every other aspects of life. Besides, improving these I could become aware

of other programs and became familiar with many APT beneficiaries who attended APT's Programs and had international trips.

After participating at APT's event my attitudes and the way of thinking have changed. In the past I was a bit narrow-minded and my thoughts were limited but now it is different, I knew that how the youths' ideas and their perseverance affect the country and also world. Now I am more motivated than past to improve faster and do the things that I want.

With introducing these things I became motivated to follow the APT's programs. As I set goal for myself to be more affective community member in the future. I am committed to utilize the skills for training more youths with my behavior, classes and practical experience. At the end let me thank APT for each and every sincere steps they have taken for our improvement and I owe them for being where I stand now. Moreover, I humbly expect to continue your supports for further services.

Reza Akbari, studying Psychology in Kabul University shares about the impact of our open event on occasion of International Day of Peace:

“I had a great experience participating in the leadership class in APT, It helped me engage with my community through social activities and increased my potential to serve as a leader. We learned many aspects of effective leadership. Just thinking through the definition of leader and leadership really had an impact on me. Before coming to APT's leadership class, my understanding of these concepts was completely different. I thought of traditional aspects of leadership—charisma and divine power, like that held by political and tribunal leaders. But after graduation, I found that I could serve as a very effective leader in the society because I know that I am powerful as an individual citizen. I have a great potential for bringing people together to take part in the change that they want to create. This new image of leadership inspired different tactics and tips to interact productively in daily life with various groups like family members, teammates, friends, and classmates. I have shared what I learned from APT with my teammates at the university and my friends. Specifically, APT enhanced my listening and empathy skills, which have improved my communication with others every day since graduating from the workshop. I now actively listen to my friends and make every effort to understand what he/she said, what she/he expects from me, and how to respond empathetically to his/her actions. Before this leadership training, I was unlikely to make such a concerted effort to understand the perspectives of others. We also learned how to create a vision and how to measure progress toward our vision. The program explained how to take steps that will help us to focus on our vision and not be distracted by unwanted or unexpected factors. We also learned about the Nonviolent Communication (NVC). This has an enormous impact on wellbeing in daily life. The NVC practice is the key to be comfortable, patient, and respectful in your everyday interactions. The NVC provides me with the capability of putting myself in someone else's shoes. To sum it up, the leadership class at APT changed my image of leadership from a typical traditional and charismatic model to one based on servant leadership. It taught me that in every situation you can be a leader by selflessly serving those around you. It taught me how to live as a servant leader and work even harder than your followers. Servant leaders should direct the followers toward the goal and be light for the followers.

Thank you APT for offering such comprehensive program and for fortifying the potential of the country's youth. A special thanks to Mr. Ali Fayez who really worked hard to pave the ground for implementation of the leadership course.”