



# Narrative Report

30 December 2019

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## I. General Information

Date: 30 December 2019

Name of the Organization: Afghans for Progressive Thinking (APT)

Website: [www.apr.org.af](http://www.apr.org.af)

Country: Afghanistan

Reporting Period (Dates): 1st October, 2019 – 30th December, 2019

## II. Executive Summary

During the past period, Afghans for Progressive Thinking (APT) successfully managed to organize not only all of its planned activities, but worked on some extra initiatives as well. APT successfully held a number of debate trainings for its debate club members in partnership with universities in Kabul, Herat, Mazar, Samangan, Faizabad, Nangarhar and Kandahar, organized youth debate round on topics, “Human Rights and Afghan Peace process” and “youth’s migration abroad” in Kabul. APT also successfully organized 2019 Millennium National Debate Tournament and the National Youth Jirga in Kabul, where youth from 34 provinces of Afghanistan came together and discussed peace and post-war Afghanistan. Later in a press conference, the findings of the Jirga were shared with the Afghan Government, media and the international community.

Furthermore, 20 university students graduated from our Fall Leadership Development Course after completing the two-month course and implementing their social projects on servant leadership.

Last but not least, our students at Mehrabanon School successfully completed their final annual exams after finishing all of their classes. The following report contains a detailed description and elaboration of the implemented activities and their impact on our participants on an individual and a group level.

## III. Main Activities:

### Debate

During the past quarter, APT held a number of show debate rounds in Kabul, Mazar and Samangan, in order to prepare students for the Millennium National Debate Tournament 2019 and organized youth debate round on the topic “Will Human Rights and Gender Equality Be Compromised in the Peace Process?” at the US Embassy and “Seeking Asylum Abroad; Is Migration a Choice?” at the European Union Delegation in Kabul. In the debate round on youth’s immigration, the debaters talked about the role of youth in the development of the country, and how important it is for youth to stay in Afghanistan and work for the progress of their country. In the debate round on human rights and peace process, students

debated about the achievements made in the sphere of human rights and gender equality in the past 18 years and the importance of safeguarding them during the peace process. They mentioned that there is no peace without human rights. People in attendance to watch the debate rounds included representatives from the government, partner embassies and private and public universities in Kabul.

### Millennium National Debate Tournament 2019

On 27th and 28th December 2019, APT organized the Millennium National Debate Tournament (MNDT) 2019 at the gymnasium hall of Kabul Polytechnic University. MNDT 2019 was the biggest youth debate tournament which focused on the global goals and goal number 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) in particular. MNDT 2019 gave the stage to young men and women to debate on very controversial topics related to Afghanistan, the region and the globe. Some of the topics students debated included freedom of expression, human rights, costs of peace, and role of youth in creating an open society in Afghanistan. It was interesting that even though students desired for peace, they were concerned about the costs of it. They said that they would not “pay too much” for peace which would be major compromise on people’s civic rights such as freedom of expression, inclusion of women and minority groups in public life, and education of girls. This year, more than 150 debaters, club leaders, adjudicators, volunteers, and observers from Kabul University, Avicenna University, Kabul Polytechnic University, AUAF-PDI and Kardan University participated in this great event. In addition, APT also hosted eight debaters and two adjudicators from Mazar and Samangan. Mr. Esmat Tariq Fahim and Hasibullah Artiq from Kabul Polytechnic University received the championship award, while Mr. Mustafa Raheel was able to secure the Best Judge award. Meanwhile, Miss Zainab Amerzai of Kabul University secured the first Best Speaker award, Mr. Mohammad Idres Qaderi of Kardan was selected for the second award, and Mr. Reshad Haidari received the third place award.

### Jawazjan University Debate Training and Demo Debates

Upon the request of the Jawazjan University students, APT staff provided a two-day debate training to forty-five students from different faculties of the university and hosted two demo debate rounds in their university. This was the first time a university in North Western Afghanistan received an organized training on debating skills. They were very excited to learn and practice the basics of debate, public speaking, critical thinking, team-working, and leadership skills.

### **Networking Event**

Building relationships with people from different backgrounds is vital for creating and fostering a more peaceful environment in the community. When young men and women from diverse cultures and backgrounds know and understand one another and gain the skills of logical thinking and an understanding of social tolerance, they form a peaceful community and have a huge positive impact over other youth.

We believe that people learn best by encountering others from different backgrounds and also people who have different aspirations and opinions. In this regard, on December 3, 2019 APT organized a networking event in Kabul. During this event, APT hosted more than 70 young men and women, including

debaters, debate club leaders, government representatives, civil society activists and APT debate alumni. The event allowed participants to share ideas and experiences and prepare for the upcoming national debate tournament (Millennium National Debate Tournament 2019). The participants established new friendships amongst themselves and the club leaders had the opportunity to share their lessons learned. In this event, Rohullah Roshan from Kabul University Debate Club and Mr. Mustafa Dawar from AUAF-PDI received the Best Volunteer Club Leader awards of the year.

## Leadership

On 15th October 2019, APT commenced 2019 Fall Leadership Development Program. Twenty students from different public and private Kabul-based universities attended the session and were provided with the opportunity to get to know each other. The session began with an introduction about APT and a short description about the leadership development program. Throughout the two-month-long program, APT presented sessions that provided insight and techniques on how to influence people effectively, communication skills, different concepts of leadership including servant leadership, the power of listening, problem solving methods, decision making skills, and traits of a successful leader. In the end, students took part in different practical activities and exercises to apply the knowledge they gained in real life scenarios.

Some of the leadership sessions were convened at the Netherlands Embassy, Canadian Embassy and German Embassy in Kabul in order provide students with different perspectives on leadership and allow them to not only meet Afghans but also leaders from other countries.

After completing the leadership program at APT, students were divided into two groups and were assigned to implement certain social projects related to servant leadership. The first group implemented their social project called “From Impossible to Possible” at the Professional School of Blind People in Kabul on 19th November 2019. Over 25 participants from the school attended the event. APT leadership students provided presentations on servant leadership, goal setting and selfawareness to the high school students.

On 23rd November 2019 the second group of APT’s Leadership Development Program called “Next Generation Leaders” went out and distributed packages of hats, gloves and scarves to children and elders living on the streets of Kabul in order to keep them warm during the cold days of the winter and bring a warm smile on their faces.

APT’s 2019 Fall Leadership Development students graduated on 28th November 2019 and received certificates from APT. They ended the program with much excitement to practice in real life what they had learned in the class.

## Youth Representative to the United Nations 2019

The official term of the second Afghan Youth Representative to the United Nations, Ms. Aisha Khurram, completed. Ms. Khurram’s central task was to deliver a speech at the UN Security Council meeting in January 2020. The content of the speech was expected to be informed and reflective of the perspective

of youth from across Afghanistan. Therefore, APT facilitated for Ms. Khurram to meet students from a wide range of public and private universities. She was able to travel to Balkh. With youth from other provinces, she met them in Kabul or video called to hear their observations about the situation and desires for the future of Afghanistan.

Additionally, the 2019 Youth Representative had a chance to participate and engage in discussions with youth in the National Youth Jirga which was organized by APT and brought 100 young people from all 34 provinces of Afghanistan in Kabul. Furthermore, the Youth Representative initiated an online campaign, the Afghan Youth Call, to reach out to more youth from all the corners of the country. Through this initiative, around 50 Afghan youth recorded short video clips and posted online tagging @APTYouth and @AfghanYouthRep to seek their attention. Ms. Khurram watched all the videos and took note of their messages.

These engagements prepared Ms. Khurram for her first important trip abroad to Germany as the Afghan Youth Representative. She travelled to Berlin along with Ms. Ramyar of APT on December 10, 2019 and met with Members of the German Parliament (Bundestag and Members of South-Asia Parliamentary Group ( Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, and German Youth Representatives. Discussions in Berlin focused on questions by German colleagues about the Afghan peace process, elections, and the aspirations of Afghan youth. Ms. Khurram echoed the voices of Afghan youth all of whom had called for ceasefire, lasting peace, and development in their country. She said Afghan youth are capable of leadership and they are active players in the process to bring positive change to their communities. She also thanked the German people, government, and parliament for standing beside Afghans and supporting peace, security, human rights, and development in Afghanistan. She called for sustained political and developmental support to Afghan people until there is a peace agreement.

The discussions in Germany further prepared the Afghan Youth Representative for her next challenge to deliver an informed speech at the United Nations<sup>1</sup>. On January 16, 2020, Ms. Khurram delivered a remarkable speech that reflected the will, capabilities, and desires of her generation. She invited representatives of the Taliban, the main insurgent group in Afghanistan, including Taliban youth to a civil discourse about the future of Afghanistan. She called on the Taliban and the Afghan government to cease war immediately and make peace to pave the way for the development of Afghanistan. Ms. Khurram thanked the international community for sustained support to Afghanistan which has allowed her to pursue higher education, claim her real Afghan identity, and contribute to the Afghan society. She invited Members of the United Nations to oversee the Afghan peace process including the implementation of a potential Peace Agreement.

After she returned from New York City to Kabul, Ms. Khurram along with APT's Executive Director were invited to meet with German Ambassador Peter Prugel, German Minister of State at the Federal Foreign Office Mr. Niels Annen who was visiting Kabul, Acting Foreign Minister of Afghanistan, UN Officials, Afghan civil society activists, and journalists to share about her experience as the Afghan Youth Representative to the UN in 2019.

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<sup>1</sup> Link to the speech:

[https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=577197979491555&id=390858811458807&sfnsn=mo](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=577197979491555&id=390858811458807&sfnsn=mo)

## Mehrabanon School

During the past quarter, students continued to attend classes regularly. They finished the first educational year successfully and will take a break in the winter before starting the second grade in March 2020.

Teachers reported improvement in reading and comprehension skills of the students. The school's staff engaged with the students' parents and kept them informed about their children's studies. In 2020, Mehrabanon will recruit at least 20 new students for grade one which will increase the number of students from 60 to 80 people.

## National Youth Jirga

APT organized the National Youth Jirga<sup>2</sup> on 6th November 2019. In the National Youth Jirga, 96 youth from all 34 provinces of Afghanistan came together and discussed various topics regarding Afghan youth involvement in the peace process and post-peace Afghanistan. Youth were divided in 6 committees and each committee was assigned a specific topic to discuss. Each Committee had 10-12 members and the topics they discussed were: *Democracy, Good Governance, Women and Politics, Economic Development, Education, Strong Institutions, Gender Equality and Youth and Politics*. The Jirga ran for two days. At the end, participants presented their policy drafts to a panel of judges and their fellow Jirga participants. Committee on Peace was recognized as the group with the Best Policy by the panel. All Committees created groups on social media and continue to exchange views to this day.

The National Youth Jirga provided youth from the remotest parts of Afghanistan with a platform to meet young men and women from different corners of Afghanistan, challenge and be challenged by views of others, share their policy proposals to make Afghanistan a more peaceful and open country, and build friendships which will potentially last a life-time. At the same time, the participants had the chance to take part in discussions regarding the social challenges they face in their communities and also offering practical solutions.

## National Youth Jirga Press Conference

One 10th December 2019, APT held a Press Conference on the National Youth Jirga at the Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies (AISS). The purpose of this conference was to share the proposals of the National Youth Jirga with Media, the Afghan government, civil society and the international community. Representatives from government at Deputy Minister level, civil society leaders, and students participated in the event.

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<sup>2</sup> Jirga translates as assembly. This is a traditional way of gathering to resolve conflicts or make decisions in Afghanistan. Jirgas are usually conducted by senior individuals of the society. APT challenged the current perceptions by organizing the National Youth Jirga and demonstrated that youth too can contribute positively in Afghanistan together with other members of the Afghan society.

#### IV. Qualitative Impact

Given APT's vision to create an Afghanistan where people from all walks of life are not only tolerated but celebrated, youth have opportunities to flourish, and voices of minorities and the unheard are heard, our activities were able to make encouraging impact on our society and people's lives over the past quarter. There are many examples to cite here. Sixty children, girls and boys, who used to spend all of their day time on the streets picking trash to burn and keep themselves warm in the winter of 2018 were able to spend 7 hours a day at APT's Mehrabanon School in 2019 and complete first grade in December. These are some of the most talented children in Afghanistan and there is no doubt they will do great things for the future of Afghanistan. While they improved in their studies every quarter in 2019, their reading and comprehension skills improved significantly in the last quarter. Children's parents thanked the School's leadership for providing quality and free of charge education for their sons and daughters. Parents said that "the education of this School has brought hope to the lives of their children". Each one of these children have big visions and ambitions for the future. Some want to become doctors to treat the sick, some desire to become construction engineers to transform the shape of their cities from a war-ravaged looking to a prosperous one, and some of them aspire to become political leaders.

Similarly, APT's Afghan Youth Representative to the United Nations who was selected through a rigorous process said "her dreams came through" in this initiative. Ms. Asiah Khurram, a Kabul University student of Political Science, says she never believed that one day she would speak in front of global leaders at the prestigious United Nations Security Council. APT provided her exactly that opportunity. As a result, she now believes in herself and her generation. She is working harder than before to contribute to building community level peace by visiting youth, traveling to the provinces, and engaging in forward-looking discussions. The call for applications for the Third Afghan Youth Representative in 2020 is already out and people are excited to apply and become the next youth voice at a national and global level.

Hundreds of other young Afghans who participated in debate, research and leadership programs also went through a self-transformation process. Zakia Yaqubi, a student of Journalism at Kabul University shared about debate and research program impact " APT's debate and research programs helped me to discover my weaknesses and also improve my skills to be a confident while I interact with people and men."

Students who participated in the leadership development program said they always thought leadership was about themselves. Through the program they were challenged to think of leadership as an opportunity to serve others. They spent hours discussing the meaning of "service", what it takes to assume such an approach in life, and what models and examples in history exist. In the end of the program, each student was passionate to undertake a project only to begin their journey of service to the Afghan community and spread hope by doing so. One group went to a local high school and did a presentation on leadership concepts they had learned; another group of students went to the streets and distributed warm clothes to the poor.

APT's programs challenged oppressive perceptions through debate tournaments, urged students to practice values of service and love in the communities through leadership training, practically spread hope and love through the School, and provided policy options for leaders of not only Afghanistan but of the world through the Afghan Youth Representative to the UN.

## v. Challenges and Lessons Learned

Leading APT and organizing events in Afghanistan come with many challenges. Security remains a major challenge particularly the risk of "collateral damage" as a result of frequent car bomb explosions, suicide attacks, and rocket firings have been on the rise due to the war between an insurgency and government forces. Such incidents create road closures and cancellation of events at the last minutes which could lead to frustration. Low level of participation of young women in activities especially in remote parts of Afghanistan continues to be an issue at APT. Electricity outage increased in the cities because either criminals or militants broke electricity poles a few times during the last quarter. This resulted in little access to internet and communication among APT staff and members. Most mid-level government leaders still do not understand or recognize the importance of APT's work. They do not cooperate in delivering their promises in a timely manner. A combination of all of these challenges slowed down APT's activities many times. Even though it has been somewhat frustrating, we had to constantly meet and remind ourselves that these challenges are reminders that our work is important. Thus, we need to keep going. Experiencing change before our very own eyes in the National Youth Jirga, the School, and other activities gave us motivation and excitement to keep going. Our excitement and hope for the future helped us overcome the challenges or organize events in spite of them.

## VI. Impact Stories

*Saifullah Atahi, a student at the Journalism Faculty of Kabul University, wrote us about leadership program impact:*

"I study journalism at Kabul University and lead the Kabul University Debate Club. I am also an English instructor at a language center. I like reading novels and magazines. I am good at making new friends. I came to know about the Leadership Development Course of APT in early 2019 and I was very interested to attend it, as a result, I managed to join the course. During the course, I learnt various points about leadership, its fundamentals and styles. Besides, I made some very nice friends from different backgrounds and leadership potential. In addition, we met talented instructors at the embassies and the APT office. Since they were from different countries such as the US, Canada, Germany and Netherland, we came to know what different leader's perspectives and what they think about the Afghan people. We learned what honor and respect are, how important trust is and how to influence people more. Overall, our leadership course was awesome.

To lead is to influence. It can be at home, at the university or the whole community and since I am currently leading a debate club, I need to know a lot about it. This course helped me lead the club very well. I could

build more trust and give room to every individual in the club. Before the members were less interested in the weekly sessions so we could not practice well. In contrast, we had a tournament ahead so we needed to practice more. During the course, I decided to change my leadership style so that I make the members more interested. I realized I was more like a position leader at the club and I came to know that being a people and servant leader would be more efficient. Therefore, I decided to interact more with the members, have some suggestions individually and provide them with more practice materials. As a result, we held our sessions regularly now and are ready for the tournament ahead. All this happened after I joined the leadership class. Therefore, I am pleased with APT and my instructors for being significantly effective in my life.”

I believe that learning about topics like Self-awareness, Respect, Influence, Problem-solving, Forgiveness, Effective listening not only help me in leadership direction but also they will help me in my personal life as well.

**Aisha Khuram, 2019 Afghan Youth Representative to the UN wrote us:**

“I can’t think of a trip that had a bigger impact on my personal and professional life than the one I took to the United Nations and Berlin.

As a diplomacy student, I used to read books about leadership, political history of the world, diplomacy and world order, but I’ve never understood how it really feels to experience diplomacy and leadership in real life. I’ve been always trying to attend model United Nations conferences during my first years of study at Kabul University in order to get an understanding of the United Nations, its Charter and its role in global issues, but all I could get was a very slight understanding of United Nations and its diplomats’ performance. While attending my political science classes at Kabul University, I’ve never imagined that someday it would be possible for an undergraduate student to get to the most prestigious diplomatic platform and represent an entire generation. It was like a dream come true when I first saw the application form for the Afghan Youth Representative program – that was an unexpected and life changing process for me both personally and professionally.

As a political science student, I always believed that diplomacy is all about knowledge of history, politics and staying up to date with the ongoing international affairs, but we are now living in a rapidly changing, globalized world that demands political knowledge beyond traditional academic curricula. By getting engaged with young leaders, UN diplomats and high level government officials both inside and outside of the country, my professional and student life have transformed dramatically. I learned that we can’t summarize diplomacy to the knowledge of history and politics as there is a combination of skills that define an effective diplomat. They range from verbal and written communication skills, to problem solving, leadership, critical thinking, negotiating, policy making, political analysis and cross-cultural communication. This platform enabled me to think out of the box, discover political knowledge beyond my classroom, and most importantly, understand the profound meaning of global citizenship.

On a personal level, my trip to Berlin and then to UN broadened my world view. By leaving my comfort zone and by interacting with people from different cultures, I learned a great lesson that despite our differences, fundamentally we are all the same human beings, we all seek happiness, try to avoid suffering, and we all share the same basic needs and concerns. I also learned about servanthood – a

process which also made me take my eyes off of myself and see the situation through the eyes of others. With every story, I lived a new life, experienced a new pain and learned a new lesson, hence my feelings to serve my homeland, my people and my generation got stronger and more powerful.

I learned endurance at the face of difficulties and challenges, and that wouldn't be possible without going through challenging phases that I've experienced during my mission. I learned that if you want to grasp the attention of a generation you need to be socially aware, and promote a hundred percent authentic message, which needs to be consistent. I learned negotiating, networking, critical thinking and cross-culture communication skills. As far as cross-cultural communication is concerned, it impacted both my personal and professional life – I built a network of new acquaintances and ventured beyond my small, limited network of classmates to a broader and diverse one, and this made me realize that how much small human to human communication can influence an entire society and develop a mutual understanding among an entire generation.

Finally, I found my purpose, my passion and my vision. I fell in love with diversity; I embraced change; I decided to serve humanity by pursuing my political science studies; I decided to be a responsible global citizen working for the preservation of our shared global community. This short term trips indeed had a long term impact on me – I would have never imagined that my life would be transformed in just 10 days. Young people in my country need more of these opportunities as providing such platforms and opportunities can build a community of young visionaries and responsible leaders. I strongly believe that the only way to elevate the efficiency of our political system is to train the younger generation of Afghanistan with practical experiences, encourage them to voice their opinions, embrace diversity and work for humanity. This wouldn't be possible without APT and German embassy that strive to provide exceptional and priceless experiences for a life time.

Today, dead hopes are revived, dreams are realized and hidden talents are showcased to the world. Indeed, these are the first steps towards a generational change”.

**Ommul Banin, a student of Political Science from Balkh University, wrote us about the debate and research program:**

“I am a senior student of Law and Political Science at Balkh University. One day while I was checking some social media blogs, I saw the APT weblog and I saw a new post that APT wanted to organize the research training and I applied via Balkh Debate Club. After a while, I was invited for an interview which asked a few questions regarding my interest and the reason I wanted to be part of this program. Fortunately, I was able to become part of this amazing program in Balkh province this year. I regularly participated in all research and debate training scheduled at our university. These training has been so fruitful in my personal and academic lives. Through debate and research classes, I understood the basic roles of research and what points to consider while conducting a research paper and debating. Fortunately, my research paper was selected as one of the two best research papers in Balkh province. It was another great chance, to get feedback on my paper and work more on it to improve it. As a result, today I am more confident that I am able to conduct research correctly.

In my opinion, research leads a society to the way of development. It helps people to be updated on the issues going on nationally and internationally and to think critically about the topics in their personal and professional lives. Research helps people to be more patient and see things from different angles.

In our country, people don't know much about research and its benefits. I was one of those people that didn't know about research and the fascinating world of research. When I participated in this training, I learned about research and how to conduct it. It's so extremely beneficial and now I have decided to do a lot of research on various topics because I love extending my knowledge.

All in all, I confess that research and debating did bring lots of changes in my social life and personal life. For example, it improved my critical thinking, public speaking, and communication skills. I learned about accepting each other's opinions and that people can state their needs even if they are in conflict with our own. It opened my vision to my country and all around the world, encouraging me to meet people from all levels of society and be aware of their situation, and finally improving my public speaking. I hope that every person gets to experience this first hand."

## VII. Number of the participants in all activities

Activities of the last quarter	Total of Participants	Male	Female
Leadership	20	14	6
National Debate Tournament	150	90	60
Jirga	70	40	30
Networking Event	30	19	11
US Embassy Debate	50	30	20
EU Delegation Debate	45	28	17
Afghan Youth Representative	1	0	1
Press Conference	32	20	12
Demo Debates	50	30	20
<b>Total of Participants</b>	<b>448</b>	<b>271</b>	<b>177</b>