

National Youth Jirga Policy Brief

About Afghans for Progressive Thinking

APT is the largest youth-led national organization that works to promote peace and critical thinking among youth and children in Afghanistan. APT uses two social theories of change, namely contact theory of change and critical thinking theory of change, to reach its vision.

Since its inception in 2010, APT has impacted over 30,000 students across seven provinces of Afghanistan. APT is partnering with over 35 public and private universities and youth organizations on a national, regional and international level to further advance its mission and commitment to its vision.

APT's primary focus falls into three categories:

1. Capacity building through debate and leadership development programs;
2. Research and advocacy through publications, conferences, and media talk shows;
3. Networking through exposure trips within Afghanistan and abroad and participating in social programs of international organizations and youth from other countries;

As a member of the United Network of Young Peacebuilders (UNOY), APT has worked towards the approval of resolution #2250 back in 2015. In addition, APT started the Afghan Youth Representative to the United Nations program in 2018 and selected the first Afghan youth representative who spoke about the role of Afghan youth in peacebuilding in front of the Security Council on September 17, 2018.

The second selection process of the Afghan Youth Representative to the United Nations was completed in the presence of representatives from APT, the Deputy Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan, the Secretary General's Special Representative for Afghanistan and national and international media through a competitive process on October 8, 2019. On behalf of Afghans youth, the selected representative will brief the Security Council of the UN in New York on December 23, 2019.

The strategic plan and vision of Afghans for Progressive Thinking (APT) on the national level is to promote its vision to 34 provinces of Afghanistan by 2030.

National Youth Jirga

Introduction

Afghanistan's Current Situation

As every country has its own history, its history is the evidence of its success and failures. Afghanistan as an independent country has a long history of upheavals and prosperous times as well. Today, the country finds itself at a crucial time in history too, as for the last two decades Afghanistan has had to deal with the challenges of re-establishing peace in almost every corner of its territory. Using the comparative and analytical approaches to study the development of the country's history and politics can bring about surprising revelations. For example, if we compare today's Afghanistan with the decade of the 1370s, we notice that the country has reached greater levels of development on different levels. For example, telecommunication service has been widely introduced. Afghanistan has the most democratic constitution. The construction of thousands of kilometers of roads and the introduction of different modes of transportation has greatly facilitated travel and movements of goods and services country wide. Moreover, women, who were living like captives in their homes, now represent their respective constituencies in the parliament and they have managed to assume a number of leadership positions within the government.

In addition, nowadays, more than 160 public and private universities operate within the country with more than 300,000 male and female students, while previously only a few dysfunctional universities existed. In terms of state-building, the military and security forces were rehabilitated and democracy and reconstruction also considerably improved. Apart from the comparative review, analyzing the extensive amounts of funds and the developments materialized so far show that the government's weak governance and the widespread mismanagement of international aid have led to the imbalance between the aid and the developments materialized as a result.

Peace Process

Peace is a broad notion in today's world. Peace and security are most of the time linked to harmony and stability among the members of the world community. Security is believed as a psychological feeling, which brings peace and reconciliation by eliminating threats. In a peaceful world, people would be able to achieve their goals that can contribute to the development of society and improvement in people's lives. Afghans are in a crying need of peace more than any other nation because they have been suffering from war and conflict for forty years which has adversely affected people's lives in many different ways.

Lack of a solution to the on-going conflict might double people's frustration with the current situation. This might also increase people's mistrust towards the intention of the international community to really help Afghanistan. What is more, the lack of a final resolution to the conflict may also adversely affect the achievements and progress reached during the past two decades. The continuation of the war, on top of the fatal human casualties in Afghanistan, can ignite extremism and terrorism further in the region and result in heavy political, social, military and cultural losses for the whole country and the international community as well. Therefore, it is time for all involved parties in the conflict to take fundamental steps towards ending the war

and establishing durable peace along with the countries in the region and international community.

Considering the economic, political and military transformations of the past few years in the region, the foreign allies of Afghanistan need to review their current strategy and modify their approach to peacebuilding in the region as well. These strategies need to be transformed to respond to the needs and expectations of all people affected by them, and they should also protect the interests of Afghanistan and its neighbors as well.

To make the expected development possible for Afghanistan and achieve sustainable peace the following points should be considered in peace talks:

- a) Agreement on a ceasefire between the government and the Taliban during the peace negotiations and methods of monitoring and observing the ceasefire;
- b) Agreement between the states of Afghanistan and Pakistan on mitigating misunderstanding and disagreements over historically disputed issues;
- c) Agreement among all countries and organizations participating in the negotiations to continue their cooperation with Afghanistan until the country achieves durable peace, political stability, and reconstruction;
- d) Agreement among all countries and organizations participating in the negotiations on how to continue military assistance for Afghanistan to guarantee a durable peace;
- e) Agreement between the government and the Taliban and their inclusion into governance through democratic and legal processes;
- f) Agreement among all countries and organizations participating in the negotiations on an effective strategy to compel all parties to respect the final agreement.

The purpose of organizing a National Youth Jirga

Currently, national and international efforts are made to bring peace in Afghanistan. If a peace agreement is established, the main question is what Afghanistan should look and what the role of youth will be?

To find out the answers, APT organized a one-day National Youth Jirga on November 6, 2019, in Kabul. In this conference, youth from 34 provinces of Afghanistan (27 females and 47 males) gathered and exchanged their views and ideas on various topics embracing politics and youth, democracy and good governance, women and politics, economic development and education regarding the peace process and Afghanistan after a peace agreement.

In the Jirga, participants were divided into different committees where they exchanged their ideas on specific topics and at the end of the discussions; they presented their findings to the participants and the judges' panel.

The participants of this Jirga recognized the achievements reached during the last 18 years in Afghanistan; however, they also emphasized that the aid received from the international community has been mismanaged due to corruption and lack of accountability. Financial mismanagement of international aid has further increased corruption and reduced foreign investment in the country. These factors have also strongly affected the security and

education fields. The National Youth Jirga participants supported the peace process and demonstrate concern with the insignificant involvement of women and youth in the process.

This document briefly summarizes the challenges and solutions suggested by participants of all committees in the National Youth Jirga program.

The participants outlined the following challenges and solutions related to their committee themes in National Youth Jirga program:

1 . Youth and Politics

Challenges:

- Insufficient involvement of youth in the peace talks,
- Mistrust between the government and youth,
- Low level of youths' public awareness on benefits of peace, and
- failure to recognize the role that youth can play in the peace talks and post-conflict Afghanistan

Solutions:

- Revising and refining the reconciliation strategies to reach the required transparency and a clearer definition of peace term such as reconciliation, reintegration, and ownership of the peace process,
- Strengthening the coalition of youth and youth-focused organizations through sectoral ministries like the Ministry of Education (MoE), Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) Ministry of Information and Culture (MoIC), Ministry of Hajj and endowment, by implementing effective and constructive plans on national unity using the approach that will reduce the distance between city and rural youth,
- Accelerating economic development by providing opportunities to deduce the obstacles for people living in rural areas to get educated,
- Developing specific strategies to counteract the destructive and interventional policies of neighboring countries, and
- Taking part in joint programs with the regional and neighboring countries in order to build sustainable peace.

1. Economic Development

Challenges:

- Considering the geographical location of the country, solving borders and water related problems of Afghanistan is a must,
- Problems with financial investment and the need of national human resources experts in infrastructural projects
- Lack of sufficient support for private and national sectors and foreigner investors
- Diminishing public and investors trusts' in the government
- Non-economic use of natural resources and air pollution

Solutions:

- Making short and long-term policies for mining and its usage for the improvement of national industries,
- Increasing exports of products and decreasing exports of raw materials,
- Increasing imports of raw materials and decreasing imports of products,
- Focusing on the economic development of villages by promoting and supporting newly established start-ups.

2. Education

Challenges:

- Social insecurity, such as different kinds of violence in schools. Teacher-student violence and vice versa, street harassment, schools' closure due to individual, group and regional competitions,
- Poverty and difficult lives of Afghan teachers due to small salaries that lead them to financial insecurity and less motivation.
- Corruptions; administrative corruption, and bribery in recruiting teachers and other staff, fewer employment opportunities for students, the existence of sexual harassment of girls at schools or on the way to school, and
- Unprofessional teachers and staff due to fewer teachers' capacity building opportunities and specific programs to improve organizational behaviors.

Solutions:

- Establishing the Youth Council to contribute to social security
- Government and global strive to raise the salaries of teachers and to focus on families that cannot send their children to school,
- Establishing, equipping and completing labs to accommodate practical training in different subjects, establishing libraries and encouraging students to benefit from them, specializing of fields from ninth grade, integrating similar subjects, creating libraries, and research centers to improve the quality of curricula and teaching,
- Monitoring and evaluation of the teaching system,
- Conducting capacity-building programs for teachers to improve their teaching skills through online courses, professional seminars and workshops, and improving the abilities of students by organizing competitive programs among classes and also schools through cultural committees in schools.

3. Women and Politics

Challenges

- Lack of female representation in the peace talks,
- Cultural barriers to women's political, cultural and social activities,
- Low literacy rates among women,
- Fear of Taliban governance and their regressive politics, and lack of clarity in the content of the peace negotiations with Taliban regarding women's rights and their freedom after a peace agreement has been reached,
- Lack of a specific and effective processes for selecting female representatives in national decision-making, especially their low participation in the peace negotiations with the Taliban,

Solutions

- Increasing literacy programs for women in remote areas,
- Developing organizations and associations that can strengthen women's capacity,
- Considering women's rights in talks with Taliban based on domestic and international regulations as a red line and protection women during the peace process with the Taliban, and

- Specifying desirable and acceptable criteria by considering the education level and experience of female representatives in negotiating boards with Taliban other national decision-makers.

4. Democracy and Good Governance

Challenges

- High-level insecurity and the existence of powerful parties,
- Failure to implement and enforce the law effectively, particularly when it comes to government officials being involved in unlawful practices
- Lack of transparency, increased corruption, and slow service delivery in governmental and non-governmental organizations,
- Lack of sufficient and active participation of citizens in governmental decision making,
- Existence of multiple religious schools (most of them are not registered with the government) and promotion of radicalism by some of them,
- The existence of armed violence and irresponsible armed groups such as Taliban, Al-Qaeda, Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), and irresponsible armed groups.
- The class between democracy and traditional values
- Low-level of public awareness, and
- Patriarchy/male-dominance is socio-political life and lack of women's participation in governmental offices and organizations,

Solutions

- Decentralization; submission of delegation to local authorities,
- Strengthening monitoring agencies and public participation,
- Striving to raise public awareness (civil rights and citizenship),
- Involving youths in the government decision-making process,
- Developing economical plans based on strategies such as: employment, direct governmental investment in infrastructure and construction projects, economic incentives through decreases in taxes, privatization through the provision of physical, legal and security platforms and the development of entrepreneurship,
- Fair distribution of national wealth,
- Illegal weapons collection,
- Social move toward peace,
- Peacebuilding with a focus on tolerance and acceptance,
- Dynamic diplomacy,
- Efforts for building a national, regional and global consensus for peace in Afghanistan and the region.

The situation of Afghanistan after the peace Agreement

Should the peace in Afghanistan be restored through a democratic, a legal process, foreign investment in the country could increase, and this could be followed by developments in the social and cultural spheres. By the elimination of insecurity and terror, bright minds can have the opportunity to spread their modern views in the absence of fear. The ideological framework of the country can absorb modern thoughts and spread them. This

transformation can further limit the possibilities for the raise of extremism so the regressive people will be marginalized in the society. Furthermore, the academic and professional elites can gradually take over from warlords and which can consequently lead to meritocracy and good governance. Afghanistan after the peace agreement would be a country with more grounds for strengthening the rule of law and justice more than any other time in history.

Conclusion

The Jirga has provided constructive suggestions to reduce security challenges, ensure lasting peace, improve the quality of education, fight corruption effectively, ensure the rule of law, and undermine extremism. According to the Jirga, meritocracy, increasing the role of youth and women in national affairs, making changes to the laws to facilitate investors' engagement, revising education curricula and overseeing religious schools can be some of the most important strategies to solve the above-mentioned challenges.

Afghans for Progressive Thinking appreciates the contributions of Mr. Ahmad Zia Rafat for analyzing and making the policy concise.

Note: The original version of this policy brief is written in Dari language and it has been translated to English. In case of any ambiguity, please refer to the Dari version of the policy briefs of National Youth Jirga.