



**Afghans
For Progressive
Thinking (APT)**

Narrative Report

Contents

I. General Information	3
II. Executive Summary.....	3
III. Main Activities.....	4
Debate	4
Celebration of International Women’s Day	5
Focused Group Discussions	5
Online Campaign on Coronavirus	6
Leadership Program	6
Application for the Afghan Youth Representative 2020	6
Mehrabanon School	7
Girls Exchange Program	7
IV. Qualitative Impact.....	8
V. Challenges and Lessons Learned.....	8

APT's 10th Anniversary

On 11 March 2020, APT turned 10. It has been an exciting, challenging, and inspiring journey. Some studies show that most nonprofits in Afghanistan do not live longer than 3 years. Thanks to APT's partners particularly SPC for the faithful, dedicated, and vision-based partnership which has resulted in the sustainability of the organization which has directly impacted dozens of thousands of young people and continue to impact millions indirectly. Here is a list of 10 achievements of APT over the past 10 years.

1. We advocated for the resolution 2250 on youth, peace and security together with united network of young peacebuilders (UNOY), which was adopted by the united nations security council in 2015.
2. APT initiated the annual Afghan Youth Representative to the United Nations Program and sent the first and second Afghan Youth Representatives who had the chance to brief the Security Council of the United Nations.
3. We have trained over 30,000 youth and university students in debate and critical thinking, and we have organized over 70 provincial and 6 national debate tournaments.
4. APT established an elementary school (Mehrabanon School) in 2018 in Mazar-e-Sharif for internally displaced kids. In our school, we have 60 kids (40 females and 20 males).
5. The number of students is expected to increase in the upcoming years. APT's work has expanded from 1 province to 7 provinces of Afghanistan in the past 10 years.
6. APT has sent youth representatives as "ambassadors" to programs in the continents of Asia, Europe, Africa, and America on behalf of the Afghan youth.
7. APT's staff has increased from 1 staff in 2010 to 35 part-time and full-time staff. Additionally, over 500 people registered themselves as members of APT in the country and abroad.
8. APT has signed memorandums of understanding with 20 universities in 7 provinces of Afghanistan.
9. APT has been turned into a professional youth-focused organization with the leadership of Afghan youth.
10. APT organized National Youth Jirga, which brought together youth from across the country to discuss the Afghan Peace Process and Post War Afghanistan.

I. General Information

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Reporting Period (Dates):	1 January 2020 – 31 March 2020

II. Executive Summary

During the past quarter, Afghans for Progressive Thinking (APT) managed to organize staff leadership sessions. We were also able to renew some of the MoUs with our partner universities and recruit new members in the debate clubs. We opened the call for applications for the spring 2020 Leadership Development Program and the Afghan Youth Representative to the United Nations 2020 Program.

Additionally, APT sponsored a group of young women on an exposure trip to Tashkent Uzbekistan to attend cultural exchange activities. APT also organized events to mark International Women's Day in Kabul and other provinces and recognize the role of women in our society and promote gender equality in Afghanistan.

Furthermore, we have recruited 20 students in our Mehrabanon School as 40 of the children passed their exams successfully to start their second grade this school year.

The following report contains a detailed description and elaboration of the implemented activities and their impact on our participants on both individual and group levels. It is needless to mention that we faced some challenges in the last month due to the urgent crisis caused by Covid19.

III. Main Activities

Staff Recruitment

In January, APT renewed the employment contracts of its staff in Kabul, Kandahar, Nangarhar, Badakhshan, Herat, Balkh and Samangan.

In February 2020, APT held four orientation sessions for project staff in provinces via Skype. During these sessions, the Kabul team explained the project goals and activities to be carried out in their provinces. Meanwhile, the APT team explained changes in our working trends and new trends for running debate clubs inside universities and how to train independent leaders in the partnering institutions.

Meetings with Partner Universities and MoUs

In February 2020, APT team organized several meetings with project partner universities in Kabul and other provinces to discuss debate club's activities and seek the universities close cooperation with club members and APT office throughout the project period. Throughout these meetings, APT team discussed the challenges we encountered during the last year and we recognized the available opportunities for the up-coming activities we will undertake. Through the meeting, the chancellors of the universities expressed keen eagerness to renew MOUs, and requested APT to continue working with their students. APT also shared the updated Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with project partner universities for their review and comments. We have successfully signed the MoU's with Badakhshan University in Badakhshan, Jami University in Herat, Teacher training center, Mawlana University and Samangan University in Samangan.

The MoUs for other universities in Kabul and provinces are under the review of the university officials and we are closely following it up with them for signing.

Debate

During the past quarter, APT worked on its debate material and updated it. We conducted multiple meetings with debate club members in Kabul, Kandahar, Nangarhar, Badakhshan, Herat, Balkh and Samangan. In these meetings, we explained the objectives and activities of APT in the coming years. APT also managed to hold an election for electing the clubs' presidents, vice presidents and secretaries for the debate club for the year 2020.

APT started working on developing the debate and leadership materials in Dari. We aim to have these materials ready by the end of this month.

APT started the Girls Debate Clubs in early 2020 in addition to the existing debate clubs to provide female students with the resources to gain a greater understanding of women's rights and create a safe space for them to get support and discuss important issues that Afghan women and other marginalized communities face.

On 12 January 2020, APT organized a round of debate for female debaters from Kabul, Kardan, Professional Development Institute and Kabul Polytechnic universities in Kabul. The female students debated over women's participation in the peace negotiations with the Taliban. The winners of this round were female debaters from Kabul University: Zainab Amirzai and Khalida Daudzai, and Miss Zarafshan from Kabul Polytechnic University was awarded as the Best Speakers of the debate.

In March, we connected with the debaters at Monash University in Melbourne, Australia and began a partnership with the university's Gender, Peace, and Security Center as well as Monash International Affairs Society to hold a series of online debates on Afghan women's role in the peace process. Monash University's Ph.D. students have conducted in-depth studies on this topic globally and the theories they have developed would be interesting for the Afghan context. The inaugural debate will take place in April between four people from Afghanistan and four others from Australia which will be reported in the next quarter.

Celebration of International Women's Day

During March 2020, APT celebrated international women's day at Nangarhar University, Borna institute of higher education at Badakhshan University, Kandahar University and Polytechnic University of Kabul province. In all these events, the speakers talked about the importance of women in society and how they overcome the challenges they face in their lives.

Participants particularly said that "women just like men can take part in building our country. Women can play a major role in promoting peace at different levels starting from home by encouraging their children to gain an education to become civil society activists to Ambassadors and cabinet members and work to create a pluralistic and safe society. They shared personal stories of ordinary people they knew who are doing great work now". The women shared their stories about how they have overcome their challenges to inspire other women. Zarifa Ghafari, mayor of Wardak province, was one example. Although she comes from an insecure area of the country, she courageously fights for clean air and development in her town.

Focused Group Discussions

During the month of January 2020, APT organized three focused group discussions in Samangan, Mazar and Kabul province. We hosted a number of 20 – 25 participants from each university to discuss future coordination between APT and the partnering universities. The participants were our provincial colleagues, debate club members, Universities senior management members. The main objectives of our focused group is to channelize and

coordinate effective communications and coordination between APT and our partnering universities by identifying challenges and providing effective strategies to tackle the challenges. We identified few social and security challenges during the discussions.

Focused group discussions mostly help us to find the weakness and challenges so we can get more prepared for the future events.

Online Campaign on Coronavirus

The SPC anti-virus spread materials inspired APT to accelerate its campaign against COVID-19. APT has started an online campaign via its social media pages to raise awareness about the Coronavirus and people's role in preventing its spread. During the past month, we were also able to raise a small amount of money from APT staff and friends to help the families of those who are in bad financial situation and the lockdown will harm them the most. In March, APT identified eight poor families in Herat and five families in Kabul and bought them some basic food and cleaning items. We were also able to provide basic food and medical items to all families of our school students from our school funding because all of these children come from families who are in need of help particularly at this difficult time and we want to make sure they are safe and healthy until classes resume. We are continuing to support more families in April with the help of partners, friends and our families.

Leadership Program

During the past quarter, APT opened the application for spring 2020 Leadership Development Program. We received more than 230 applications. The applicants will go through the selection process and in-person interview after which 20 of them will be selected for the program.

Application for the Afghan Youth Representative 2020

We have started the process to select the Afghan Youth Representative to the United Nations 2020. On 11 March 2020, APT opened the call for applications which will remain open for a month until 11 April 2020. The German Embassy in Kabul has agreed to partner with APT and provide funding for the program's winner to travel to Germany and New York City. The process started with an assumption of normalcy in world travel and this may change given the current medical challenge across the world. This link includes details of the selection process <https://apt.org.af/afghan-youth-representative-2020/>.

Mehrabanon School

Despite all the current challenges in the country students strive to attend school and make significant progress. A total number of 60 students successfully completed their first grade and they are ready to begin their second grade. Our students do not have laptops, internet, or electricity at home. Therefore, it is next to impossible for us to teach them online. We are in touch with them and their parents through regular phone calls. All of our students are keenly waiting to get back to school once the COVID-19 situation is over. Additionally, we are excited to recruit 20 new students for our first grade which will increase the number of students at Mehrabanon to 60 bright children. These students make society further certain that we will not go back and nourish our minds with the wisdom of knowledge to bring peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Additionally, we completed the construction of a permanent school for our children, installed safe rooms, and it is ready to be used. We will move from the current location to the new location in the next quarter. The new place will have more rooms that will provide enough space for all the students including the new ones. It also has a yard where students will be able to play during their breaks. The new school has brought hope to its neighborhood. It is one of the few buildings in the area which encourages others to build their community physically and educationally as well.

Girls Exchange Program

APT sponsored four young women to participate in an exposure trip to Uzbekistan from 28 February to 4 March 2020. The participants had the chance to take part in a Model United Nations Program in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. The program hosted the students from around 25 countries these participants were divided into different committees of the conference to discuss political and global challenges inclusive with other cultural tours and activities.

The participants further gained knowledge and training related to skills in diplomacy, negotiation, critical thinking, public speaking, writing, and research. The program built a sense of appreciation for diversity through interaction in a multi-cultural environment. Additionally, the program enabled the participants to practice leadership and communication skills, build Ultra- culture networks which will lead to a positive change in the Afghan Society. Through this program, the female members of APT had the chance to visit different universities, educational and historical places in Tashkent and Samarqand. The Ultimate goal of the program was to create a cultural connection between Afghan youth and youth from other countries and to build a strong team spirit among Afghan women and encourage them to plan and lead such programs to promote peace and equality in society.

IV. Qualitative Impact

During the past quarter, we noticed significant progress in our students' attitudes toward each other the society. Their respect for each other's worldviews increased as a result of their participation in debates where they had opportunities to argue for positions they do not agree with in real life or oppose motions they agree with. The impact of our debates is growing in policy circles, too. As will be reported in the next quarter with details, we have started a series of online debates regarding women's participation in the peace process including in the potential peace negotiations.

Additionally, we followed up with our leadership students and we found that most of them are providing leadership training to small groups in the universities. They have also created a platform to identify poor families in need and raise funds to support them.

The Afghan Youth Representative initiative has inspired millions of youth across Afghanistan. This initiative has created a belief among youth in themselves. Afghans who are below 40 years of age are born and raised during the war. Young people have always been forced to leave their villages and flee for safety and work hard to earn their daily bread. While some have gained much resilience, life's hardship has also hardened people's hearts and taken hope away from them. APT is challenging this belief with empathy and care by showing that a young Afghan from some remote village who have always seen war in his/her life can actually serve as a Youth Representative to the United Nations and address global leaders at the world's most prestigious stage. As a result, hundreds of thousands of youth are being mobilized and they send their questions to us. We take their messages to the leaders of our country and in many cases provide opportunities for them to directly share their messages.

Our Mehrabanon School inspires us even more. Our children grew physically, mentally, and emotionally last year. It was an incredible experience for us to see children under 10 putting on uniforms and coming to school every day to read books and learn to write. They are also building community from this young age and forming big visions for the future. The families of the students are also very happy and inspired by the growth of their children. Some parents reported to us that they are learning basics from their children.

V. Challenges and Lessons Learned

Security threats, road closures, decreased cooperation from some of our partner universities due to leadership changes, and the global health crisis was among the challenges we faced in the past quarter.

We are still looking for a better location and facility for APT. There have been a few incidents of burglary and stabbing on our street over the past few months. There have also been suicide bomb explosions one kilometer away from the office. While no part of the city is completely safe, we are looking at a safer location perhaps more in the downtown area. Additionally, APT's current facility has too many windows with large glasses which can be easy to break in to or fire at by a gun. The positive point is people cannot break into it without making lots of noise that we hope would wake

up neighbors or allow for police to arrive in case of an emergency. Nonetheless, we are working to move out of this place.

There have been some leadership changes at a few of our partner universities which have slowed down their cooperation with our office. APT's activities are still seen too progressive and new people are always hesitant in the beginning to cooperate. We are working with these universities with patience to help them realize the importance of our partnership for our society. It takes many meetings, a lot of time, and enormous effort to get the support of new officials. We maintain our vision for generational change and look back at the progress we have made over the past decade and that gives us the motivation to continue to work with all people for a more open Afghanistan.

COVID-19 threats alerted us to evaluate our programs. We were one of the very few organizations that started working from home very early on when Afghanistan had only 3 positive cases of COVID. That has been necessary but also a major challenge. The staff does not always have electricity or the internet at home. APT provides them with internet credit cards but the speed of the internet remains very weak. Last month, the Taliban attacked several electricity poles which made Kabul go black for at least two weeks. Some of the activities are very difficult to organize remotely particularly when at normal times we invite dozens and in some cases hundreds of people. However, we have found some ways to utilize our resources and continue to hold some activities. Online debates, processing applications for the Youth Representative, and campaign against the spread of COVID, and provision of food items to families of our school children and other poor families are some of the activities that have provided momentum and meaning to our work during this time. The situation of COVID in Afghanistan seems to exacerbate. Currently, there are more than 600 positive cases with a dozen deaths and the numbers of growing every day. We remain hopeful and spread this hope through our online activities and empathizing with daily wage earners who have lost their jobs.

End of Report