

London Conference on Afghanistan

Women's Rights in the Future Development Framework

The past thirteen years have been a crucial period for the people and Government of Afghanistan, and their international political, military and development allies. Within this context, the London Conference on Afghanistan provides a valuable opportunity for the Government of Afghanistan and donors to assess which areas of the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework (TMAF) have progressed and where immediate attention is required. The Conference will be central to agreeing commitments for Afghanistan's future. For sustainability and effective implementation, Afghan women's full and meaningful participation from the outset is vital, along with robust commitments and monitoring and accountability mechanisms for the promotion of women's rights and an enabling environment for gender equality.

Progress towards fulfilling women's rights in Afghanistan represents a key indicator of wider progress in laying the foundations of an inclusive, democratic, and peaceful society. There have been some advances in women's rights and participation in education, employment, public life, and other spheres. 27% of the *Wolesi Jirga* (Lower House) are women and women must comprise at least 16% of the *Meshrano Jirga* (Upper House). Women also represented 34% of voters in the first round of Presidential elections. Despite this progress, only 9 out of 80 High Peace Council Members are women, and women have been absent and ignored at various critical points of the peace process. The provincial council quota for seats held by women was eroded from 30% to 25% and then to 20%. Afghan women have been marginalised in Community Development Councils under the National Solidarity Programme and internationally, Afghan women were also sidelined at the NATO Summit in Wales in September 2014.

As the co-host of the Conference, the UK is in an influential position to ensure that women can genuinely participate in the Conference and help shape Afghanistan's development path. Furthermore, as one of the largest donors to Afghanistan and a key actor in the international community, the UK should deliver on commitments, including under TMAF and the UK National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (NAP), to ensure that hard-won and still fragile gains for women's rights are consolidated and expanded.

Recommendations for the UK Government:

1. Ensure women's right to participate in all TMAF decision-making:

The UK should encourage and support effective and formal consultation to ensure Afghan women meaningfully contribute to the agenda and discussions in advance of the Conference. Additionally, Afghan women, particularly from civil society, must be supported to attend, and should have space for meaningful interventions to be able to influence the outcomes and outcome documents in addition to the TMAF monitoring and accountability mechanisms.

2. Ensure the realisation of women's rights are central to the Conference outcomes:

The UK should ensure the TMAF commitments made to Afghan women, in particular implementation of the National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA), Ending Violence Against Women (EVAW) Law, and women's economic empowerment are high on the agenda and are central to the Conference communiqué. Development and funding commitments made at the Conference should prioritise women's rights, ensuring a holistic approach and genuine commitments to working with Afghan Women's Rights Organisations.

Recommendations in Detail:

1. Ensure women's right to participate in all TMAF decision-making:

1.1. Inclusion in All Development and Security Discussions: Women must be viewed and treated as equal stakeholders in all areas of Afghanistan's development and security, and their voices must be heard across the full range of decisions that affect their social, economic, civil and political rights. In line with commitments in the UK NAP on women's participation, the UK should advocate for women's inclusion in peace and security discussion. In line with international standards, women should comprise at least 30% of Afghan delegates in decision-making processes at all levels. This includes invitations to all the UK-funded civil society delegates to the main Conference, and ongoing participation of women in all development and security discussions going forward.

- 1.2. Communiqué and Outcome Documents:** Afghan civil society delegates, including Afghan women, should have an opportunity to feed into the draft communiqué and outcome documents. This will be an important signal to the new Afghan government of the central role of civil society in Afghanistan's development. The communiqué should have dedicated space for women's rights, and should recognise the role of Women's Rights Organisations in delivering commitments on women's rights and development.
- 1.3. Participation in Monitoring:** Funds committed by donors must be conditional on the inclusion of women in all phases of the TMAF review and implementation. The UK should ensure women play an active role in the monitoring of the TMAF, including at sub-national level. This includes ensuring Women's Rights Organisations are able to review progress reports on the TMAF, particularly the EVAW Law, NAPWA and women's political participation. This verification process will enable women to review reported progress and outline where attention is required. This will be an extremely valuable accountability process and will significantly advance reporting on progress towards achievements against development targets.
- 1.4. Women's Rights Organisations and Consultation with Afghan Women:** Working with Afghan Women's Rights Organisations is crucial. Donors and the Government of Afghanistan should support Women's Rights Organisations because of their role at the forefront of service provision and protection of women's rights. This should be acknowledged at the Conference and donor commitments should include core funding to ensure their sustainability. Initiatives should build security and protection elements into their funding. Support for women's participation is also critical. Women's perspectives will be fundamental to the success of the outcomes of the Conference and the TMAF. We welcome ongoing consultation Afghan women human rights defenders and organisations and that hope this continues.

2. Ensure the realisation of women's rights are central to the Conference outcomes:

- 2.1. NAPWA Implementation:** Key challenges facing NAPWA implementation include the capacity and authority of the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) and its lack of champions with leverage inside other ministries. To address these challenges, the process of TMAF prioritisation should address support to MoWA and champions for gender and women's rights in other ministries. This is important to integrate women's rights across all sectors through the National Priority Programmes (NPPs) and sub-national governance reform. Development support from donors should include specific commitments to advance NAPWA implementation and enable gender mainstreaming across the NPPs and governance reforms, for example through the new DFID Country Operational Plan.
- 2.2. EVAW Law Implementation:** An Implementation Plan for the EVAW Law should be committed to as a specific outcome of the Conference. It should include a clear timetable for implementation and identification of funding shortfalls and plans on how these will be met. This should include a commitment to a comprehensive, coordinated and decentralised data-capturing, processing and analysis system and formal recognition of Afghan Women's Rights Organisations in accountability processes. Donors announcing or reviewing their funding to Afghanistan should outline support for EVAW implementation, for example through the new DFID Country Operational Plan and its strategic priority on VAWG.
- 2.3. Holistic Approach to Women's Rights:** It is essential that in the Conference outcomes, governments officially recognise the importance of integrating women's rights and gender equality into all policy and programming. This requires a holistic approach to programming which takes place in consultation with Women's Rights Organisations and wider Afghan civil society. For example, economic programmes should move beyond training or access to microfinance to removing barriers to women's access to the labour market. In addition, to promote an enabling environment for women's rights and gender equality, more attention is needed to develop strategies to engage men and boys, in consultation with local women.
- 2.4. Security and Justice Mechanisms:** Greater representation of women who have the authority to act in the security and justice sector is essential to ensure the effective implementation of laws to protect women and support them to report abuse. In addition, women personnel in the security and justice sector require more effective protection from abuse. It is therefore important that commitments to support to women personnel in the security and justice sector are made at the Conference. A review of the Afghan legal system to ensure that laws inconsistent with international standards on women's rights are amended or dissolved is also required, along with continued commitments to full and independent investigations into attacks against women. Few women access the formal justice system, and 'family cases' including domestic violence are mainly resolved through the traditional approach of mediation and are not formally registered. It is therefore key that women's rights and gender equality should remain a priority in security and justice sector commitments made at the Conference.