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Afghanistan: Kabul Conference raises fears of sacrificing rights for short-term peace

Plans for a peace deal with the Taliban in Afghanistan could seriously jeopardize the rights of the Afghan people, in particular Afghan women, unless concrete human rights benchmarks are incorporated, said Amnesty International in an open letter today.

The open letter goes out to representatives of more than 70 partner countries, international donor institutions and national delegates from across Afghanistan, who are meeting to build on commitments made in London in January 2010, including drawing up plans for a peace process with the Taliban and other armed groups.

“Amnesty International fears that human rights, including women’s rights, will be compromised as the Afghan government and its US/NATO partners seek a quick solution to the conflict with Taliban and other armed groups,” said Sam Zarifi, Asia-Pacific Director.

“The Taliban have a record of committing human rights abuses and abuses against women in particular and if they want to be brought back into the government then they should demonstrate that they will improve their conduct.”

In areas under Taliban control today, as when in government, the Taliban have severely curtailed the rights of girls and women, including the denial of education, employment, freedom of movement and political participation and representation.

The Taliban and related insurgent groups in Afghanistan show little regard for human rights and the laws of war and systematically and deliberately target civilians, aid workers, and civilian facilities like schools (particularly girls’ schools).

The reconciliation strategy risks legitimising impunity for perpetrators of human rights violations, including possible war crimes and crimes against humanity in Afghan society.

“The Afghan government and its international backers should ensure that former Taliban and members of other armed groups who have committed human rights abuses, war crimes and crimes against humanity are not granted amnesties and are brought to justice,” said Sam Zarifi.

“We should remember that the repeated experience of peace without justice and human rights in Afghanistan has led to further conflict and grave human rights violations over the past three decades. Peace without justice or human rights is not real peace. The route to real and lasting security can only come through the promotion of human rights and rule of law.”

In a letter sent to the delegates of the International Conference in Kabul Amnesty International has made the following human rights recommendations:

- Human rights, including women’s rights, must be guaranteed and monitored in all reconciliation strategies;
- Any agreement must include verifiable benchmarks for the parties’ conformity with their

human rights obligations;

- Afghan women are meaningfully represented in the planning stages and during the reconciliation talks, in keeping with UN Security Council Resolution 1325;
- Reconciliation talks should not result in impunity for serious violations of human rights and war crimes.

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