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Tokyo Donors Conference must be ‘turning point’ for Afghanistan human rights

Money earmarked for Afghanistan can make a lasting difference to Afghan people only if it tackles women’s rights, delivers human rights-based security and helps the hundreds of thousands of displaced people left in misery by years of conflict, Amnesty International said.

The second Tokyo International Donors Conference on 8 July will see 70 international organizations and donors come together to pledge funding and support to Afghanistan beyond 2014.

The meeting comes a decade on from the first such gathering in the Japanese capital.

“This is a critical moment – money is being pledged, now we need confirmation it will be directed to human rights improvements that make a difference to Afghan lives,” said Horia Mosadiq, Amnesty International’s Afghanistan Researcher.

“As the international military plan their withdrawal, we need guarantees to ensure the needs of half a million Afghans displaced by conflict are addressed, improvements to women’s rights continue, and that Afghan forces have the resources to investigate and compensate for civilian casualties.

“The Afghan government and its donor partners must make Tokyo the turning point – they must fulfil their promises to the Afghan people and build on the hard-won and fragile human rights gains of the last decade.”

The conference is looking to sustainable development in Afghanistan beyond 2014, when transfer of security responsibility from US/ISAF forces to the Afghan government and withdrawal of NATO combat troops will be completed.

“The conference should ensure that all ISAF/ NATO nations properly investigate allegations of civilian casualties and harm resulting from international military operations and deliver effective remedies - including compensation - before the 2014 troop withdrawal to avoid leaving a legacy of unresolved claims,” said Mosadiq.

The situation for internally displaced people in Afghanistan remains critical.

In February this year, an Amnesty International report documented how, as conflict and insecurity have intensified, numbers of displaced Afghans have reached a record half a million. They subsist in dire conditions in urban slums, deprived of their right to adequate housing, food, water, health, and education.

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that by the end of 2013 there will be 700,000 internally displaced persons in Afghanistan.

“The burgeoning problem of displacement is a human rights crisis and could lead to greater instability in the otherwise relatively stable urban areas – the Afghan government and its international partners must address this long-neglected issue,” said Horia Mosadiq.

The Afghan government is seeking financial, development and security assistance from the international community – and according to the World Bank, is expected to propose foreign assistance of up to \$4 billion in development aid yearly to 2017.

But this comes against the backdrop of slow progress on human rights.

While there have been some improvements, including passing of human rights laws, improved rights for women and girls, increased access to education and primary healthcare and the development of a vibrant community of journalists, these gains are at risk.

“Human rights gains are being increasingly undermined by insecurity and lack of respect for the rule of law, a burgeoning narcotics trade, an inept justice system, poor governance, endemic corruption and systemic poverty,” said Mosadiq.

“Tokyo participants must commit to credible and quantifiable benchmarks to monitor human rights progress such as freedom of expression and media, women’s political participation, the number of schools open in an area, school attendance, women’s access to healthcare and trends in maternal and infant mortality.”

Amnesty International is calling for women’s rights and gender equality programmes to receive adequate funding at Tokyo, and for the Afghan government and its international supporters to ensure that Afghan women are both meaningfully represented and have their concerns reflected during reconciliation talks.

“The rights of women and girls must not be sold out for expedient peace deals with elements of the Taliban and other insurgent groups,” said Mosadiq.

Notes to Editors

- Horia Mosadiq, Amnesty International’s Afghanistan Researcher, is participating in the conference and will be available for interview in Tokyo from 5 – 9 July. Horia is an Afghan woman activist and journalist with more than 15 years experience of national and international advocacy on human rights, justice and gender issues in Afghanistan. Horia played a leading role in Afghan human rights agencies, winning awards for her work. In 2007 she brought victims of war crimes to testify before the Afghan president. Languages: English, Farsi, Pashto, Urdu

- On July 7, Amnesty International is hosting a press conference with Human Rights Watch at 11:00 -12:00 at Room #16, 9th floor, Research Institute Building 14, Aoyama Campus, Aoyama Gakuin University. Afghan human rights activists will be participating.

For the text of Amnesty International’s open letter to the Tokyo Conference, 27 June 2012, please click here: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/ASA11/012/2012/en>

For the press release and a link to the report ‘Fleeing War, Finding Misery: The plight of the internally displaced in Afghanistan’, 23 June 2012 please click here: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/afghans-fleeing-war-find-misery-urban-slums-2012-02-23>

For the report ‘Afghanistan 10 years on: Slow progress and failed promises’, 6 October 2011, Please click here: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/report/afghanistan-10-years-slow-progress-and-failed-promises-2011-10-06>

To arrange interview or for more information please contact press officer Katya Nasim:

katya.nasim@amnesty.org + 44 207 413 5871 / +44 7904398103