

Afghan Women in Peace Processes

By

Zieba Shorish-Shamley, Ph. D.

Most Afghans believe that after the former Soviets withdrawal from Afghanistan, the United Nations and the international community predominately, but not exclusively, limited their peace initiatives to negotiation between the warring factions and their foreign supporters. Therefore, the unarmed and non-combatant, ninety-five percent of the Afghan people, including the Afghan women were trapped in a vicious and perpetual cycle of war. This strategy of peace initiative in Afghanistan has failed.

Within the peace initiative set by the United Nations, the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan not only must be realized and abuses remedied, but Afghan women need to be incorporated in the peace process from the onset. Restoration of Afghan woman's rights must be implemented and insured. Afghan women need to be given an equal opportunity to participate in the civic and social sectors of their country; this involves their participation in the Grand Assembly (Loya Jirga), Parliament and in the future broad-based governance body of Afghanistan. Peace without restoration of woman's rights can never be true peace

Recommendations to the United Nations and the United States for A Possible Viable Peace Solution: The Following Recommendations Are the Result of Interviews Held with Various Afghan Scholars, Experts, Journalists, Women's Rights Advocates and others.

1. The United Nations forces must move into the city of Kabul to demilitarize the city. The Grand Assembly (Loya Jirga) should take place under the auspicious of the United Nations. The Grand Assembly must include representations from all Afghan ethnic groups, political groups, military factions, religious groups, and proportional representations of the Afghan women. The Grand Assembly processes should form the interim government.
2. This government may stay in power for about two years during which the repatriation of the refugees and the reconstruction of Afghanistan should start.
3. When peace and security is restored, free election should take place, where a broad-based, democratic, representative government is formed by all people of Afghanistan, including women.
4. The Beijing Platform for Action by the United Nations emphasizes the human rights of women. These human rights include women's full and equal enjoyment of their rights in access to education, health, work and elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. Therefore, the human rights of women and girls in Afghanistan must remain a priority for the United Nations, the United States and the international community. Efforts must be focused on the rights of women and girls to have full access to health, education and work and other social and political aspects of their society.
5. The United Nations and the United States must end the monopoly of participation of the armed groups and political groups in the United Nations peace initiative. The United Nations should diversify contacts within the Afghan populace, particularly with the Afghan women inside Afghanistan as well as Afghan women refugees living in Pakistan, Iran, Tajikistan and other neighboring countries. The United Nations should formally include the Afghan Civil Society and non-violent political and social centers to become equal participants with the armed groups in the United Nations peace initiative.
6. The Afghan women must be involved in the peace process and must have the right to be effective participants in the internal and external affairs of their country and society. Having women at the table must be a condition of the peace talks. A democratic, representative government should be established, in which all members of the Afghan society, regardless of gender, age, ethnicity and religious affiliation can be equally represented.
7. The United Nations and the United States should encourage non-governmental organizations to

work in Afghanistan and to address woman's security, access to health education and other basic needs. The United Nations and the United States should provide funds for the Afghan NGOs for training of the Afghan refugee women in the areas such as empowerment, capacity-building, individual skill building, advocacy and development.

8. The United Nations and the United States should negotiate for the local population to have the right to govern themselves. The United Nations and the United States should support the idea of self-determination and a democratic system of governance for the Afghan people. The United Nations and the United States should negotiate for an agreement from the armed groups for the redrawing of the administrative unit in the government. Representation of the administrative unit should enhance the cohesion of the different ethnic groups of different territories and provinces within Afghanistan.
9. The United Nations and the United States should inject moral and human rights measures to judge the sincerity of the armed groups and political groups in the United Nations Peace initiative. The United Nations and the United States should identify and recognize the democratic elements inside Afghanistan who support human rights in general and woman's rights in particular. These elements should be supported and encouraged by the United States and the United Nations and should be included in peace talks.