

**Jamila Afghani Speech on WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY AGENDA**

**Kabul time :10:30- 11:30 am**

**22nd, April 2019**

**Introduction**

My name is Jamila Afghani, I am leading Medica Afghanistan which is a woman support organization. We provide psychosocial and legal advice and consoling for the victims of GBV and SGBV with almost turnover of 3000 direct victims on annual basis.

At the same time, I am volunteer leading Women International League for peace and freedom -Afghanistan section since 2015. WILPF is the oldest feminist, pacifist and peace organization was formed 104 years ago. I am also a member of its international board representing South Asian countries. WILPF has hundreds of volunteer members all around the world and in Afghanistan we have 10,000 members working on localization of women, peace and security agenda.

I have been engaged on advocacy related issue on GBV related on national level as well as on UN advocacy issues since 2017, especially UPR, CEDAW, CRC and UNCRPD by development of advocacy briefings, presentations, and shadow reports. Therefore, I have been actively engaged on the ongoing peace talks and I also participated in Doha intera Afghan dialogue in last June 2019. We aim to raise voices of the most vulnerable Afghan women to different advocacy level and we enhance to be engaged on localization of Women, Peace and security agenda. I am a woman activist and human right defender since past 23 years of my life

I will start my presentation by presenting a short overview of current challenges for women’s rights in Afghanistan and will then address the issue of the peace talks and of women’s participation.

**Overview on women’s rights**

The Taliban ruled in Afghanistan from 1996 until 2001, a period in which women were essentially invisible in public life, barred from going to school or working. Afghanistan is the longest war in American history. The US led an international military campaign in Afghanistan immediately after 9/11. World leaders, including those from the UK and USA, often cited the need to improve Afghan women’s rights as justification for the intervention. The military campaign was presented, in part, as “a fight for the rights and dignity of women.” After eighteen years and almost $2 trillion later, the country is still in turmoil as the Taliban maintain their grip on almost 60% of the country, the most territory it has controlled since 2001.

Women are disproportionately affected by the conflict and despite gradual improvements, women’s rights in Afghanistan remain a serious concern. Many women die in pregnancy and childbirth and on average of 6 out of 10 children die before their fifth birthday[[1]](#footnote-1). 85% of women have no formal education and are illiterate. Female students are only 18 % of students in 3rd level., Women’s life expectancy is 51-year-old.

The lack of security from three decades of war, and the risk of kidnapping and rape, has also prompted many families to force their young daughters into marriage. Most girls marry far older men — some in their 60s — whom they meet for the first time at their wedding. Women activists report that up to 80% of marriages in poor rural areas are either forced or arranged. More than 50% of Afghan girls are married or engaged by 12. Some girls are bartered into marriage to repay debt or to resolve a dispute. Widespread poverty still compels many parents to get their daughters married to avoid the cost of caring for them. Older, wealthier husbands will pay a larger bride-price for a girl. Despite the Afghan governments and international donors’ efforts since 2001 to educate girls, an estimated two-thirds of Afghan girls still do not attend school.

Psychologists attribute this anomaly to an endless cycle of domestic violence and poverty. The 2008 Global Rights survey found that nearly 90% of Afghan women have experienced domestic abuse. Many of these issues related to violence against women, impunity, child marriage, and girls’ education were raised in WILPF Afghanistan’s advocacy on the UPR and many recommendations were made by States to tackle these challenges

Targeting of schools and education personnel, night raids on households, abduction and recruitment of boys for armed violence, violence against journalists and media workers and healthcare facilities, torture of conflict-related detainees, abduction and assassination of religious leaders and sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls continue to exemplify the human rights situation in Afghanistan.

**Situation on the peace talks and intra Afghan dialogue**

Yet despite the fact that women are affected by the conflict, and although women and youth make up the majority of our population, they are minor players in political life and the economy. Women remain excluded from public life and sidelined in the current peace talks.After four decades of war, Afghanistan is today at a critical juncture. Two important results lie ahead of us: the result of peace process and the result of political conflict after presidential elections results announcement.

The Elections initially planned, with polls accounting for about 4.2 million out of the 8.8 million registered to vote. Many Afghans appeared to have stayed at home instead of going to the polling stations due to fears of violence by the Taliban and lack of trust on transparency of election commission.Voting was also marred by technical obstacles and corruption all over the country. We are also concerned about the possibility of a failed election and waste of resources. The result of election between the two major political leaders has widen the gap among political parties, and today we have two presidents .

The United States and other States have quickly facilitated the efforts toward a negotiated peace settlement since September 2018. There has been a clear absence of meaningful participation by women and other actors such as direct victims of war in the peace process, alarming many who know that an inclusive delegation for peace is important to ensuring the success of the process and the sustainability of any settlement.

Afghan women must be able to meaningfully participate in decisions that directly affect them, including in the design, implementation, and monitoring of such decisions.

Although the United States is obligated to ensure women’s active participation by its domestic Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2015 and Women, Peace, and Security Strategy of 2019, its approach to the US-Taliban peace talks has instead led to the marginalization of Afghan women.

Women have participated as members of the High Peace Council (HPC) in discussions for a peace agreement, but this is a viable pathway to meaningfully contribute since the HPC serves as a consultative body and to raise public awareness rather than to directly contribute to the peace process. The new ministry established under title of Ministry of Peace is working to bring a united voice but with all diversity is a challenging task. From other side if civil society is coming under direct control of government, their freedom would go under question. The final list of negotiators introduced by government out of 25 people, 5 are women but all these representatives are political candidates and there are no representatives from civil society. If we do not have member of civil society, how we can ensure the transparency of the negotiations.

The agreement between Taliban and USA is signed and as discussions in the Afghan peace process move away from issues of hard security and the use of violence, it is now more crucial than ever to think about the quality of peace and strategies to sustain peace. This is why a more inclusive peace process and effective gender-related provisions in any future peace agreements are important. In this context, pushing for the inclusion of women and gender issues in the formal peace process, which is lagging and has been criticized, would be a strategy to harness not only the Taliban’s acceptance of women’s legitimate concerns but also its willingness to sustain the momentum of future intra Afghan negotiations.

The absence of Afghan women in the peace talks means more than a failure of political correctness. The absence of women and their voices in the process casts doubt on the type of peace that these talks would bring to the country. The exclusion of women is also a good indication of a broader lack of inclusivity in the peace process. In a country where around two million people live with disability and where this number is increasing every day, girls and women with disability are some of the forgotten victims whose voices are not heard and whose role is disregarded. They can however be very useful actors during the peace talks with Taliban**.**

**Conclusion:**

Afghans remain concerned about the politicization of the peace talks by national, regional and international actors who do not reflect the interests of Afghan people. We know our rights, granted by our faith and guaranteed by the constitution of Afghanistan as well as required by the international conventions ratified by Afghanistan such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

The international community must stand with us at this crucial moment and ensure that our rights will not be compromised for a political peace deal, or after a settlement is reached in future intra Afghan dialogue. It is not enough for government to support women’s meaningful inclusion in the peace process verbally, but in practice to do regular consultations with Afghan women. They must represent in different technical and advisory committees to support the direct negotiators team.Therefore, I urged UN to ensure clear procedures to engage Afghan women from diverse backgrounds in all steps of peace process and conflict resolution efforts, including as negotiators, and the religious leaders who can bridge the current political gaps towards sustainable peace.

1. https://www.trustineducation.org/resources/life-as-afghan-women/ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)