



Gender Concerns International

*"Afghanistan 2016 and Beyond: Opportunities and Challenges for Women's
Political Participation and Leadership"*
Kabul, Afghanistan 15-16 December 2015



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"Afghanistan 2016 and Beyond: Opportunities and Challenges for Women's Political Participation and Leadership" is the first of four national activities organized by Gender Concerns International with its local partners.

INTRODUCTION

"Afghanistan 2016 and Beyond: Opportunities and Challenges for Women's Political Participation and Leadership", jointly organised by Gender Concerns International and its two local partners, was held from 15-16 December in Kabul, Afghanistan. The consultation was designed for Afghan civil society organisations and individuals that have a focus on women's empowerment, political participation and electoral participation in the Afghanistan context.

The core objectives were:

1. To discuss the ways in which civil society and other stakeholders can work together to ensure greater political and electoral participation of women in Afghanistan
2. Providing a platform for sharing experiences, challenges and opportunities for 2016 and beyond

The first day consisted of three individual panel discussions, each one dedicated to a separate thematic issue. The panels were titled:

- 'Women's Political Participation: Overcoming pressures and expectations'
- 'The Path to Participation: Is electoral reform a useful tool'
- 'International Gender Lobby and its relevance to National Policymaking: The case of Afghanistan'

Each of the panel discussions comprised of presentations from experts in the area, followed by ample time for question and answers. This report provides an outline of the main issues covered throughout the two-day multi-stakeholder consultation.

This conference would have not been possible without the dedication and assistance of many people. Thanks are extended to all speakers, moderators, panelists and attendees. A further thank you is extended to the Embassy of the Netherlands in Afghanistan and H.E. the Ambassador Henk Jan Bakker.



Day 1 – Panel Discussions

Prior to the commencement of the panel discussions, Ms Sabra Bano provided the introductory remarks, in addition to a tribute to Afghan women’s leadership. She highlighted the outstanding role women have played in influencing the political landscape in Afghanistan and noted that leadership and activism are powerful tools for any society. It was also stressed that women’s participation and political representation is the joint responsibility of both men and women. Female leaders must be able to share their skills and experience so that they can have a voice and contribute to the development of policy and legislation.



Following Ms Bano’s remarks, Ms. Zahra Sepehr of DSAWCO provided an overview of the ‘Bayan II’ Project and the achievements to date. It was noted that ‘Bayan I’ had a strong media focus, including how to effectively advocate and disseminate information. Bayan II’s specific focus is political participation. Activities so far have focused upon the capacity building of women’s organisations, public awareness raising and increasing the role of women in the electoral process. Female participation in the proposed 2016 parliamentary elections will also be a key focus.

Panelists and other delegates also brought to the fore a number of potential opportunities for women’s electoral and political participation. In general, there is a specific nexus that exists between challenges and opportunities. Notable opportunities identified included:

- The Afghan Constitution – there is a wide scope for challenging the current inequality within Afghanistan as equality is mandated in the Constitution.
- Challenging the Afghan Government based upon their international commitments (through international fora) e.g. Security Council Resolution 1325, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the Human Rights Council (HRC).
- The ANAP 1325 has been signed and committed to, providing a strong foundation for advocacy.
- Many international and Afghan civil society representatives participated in the London Conference. The Afghan Government committed to a lot of practical work as a result of this conference. There are a lot of available international documents that can be used to influence the current Constitution.
- Recently enacted laws also provide a significant opportunity. The Election Law has a positive description towards women. There have also been other achievements including the establishment of the Ministry of Women.
- A voter registration list is essential and should be prepared in advance to mitigate fraud
- National ID cards must be used in order to register to vote. However, women must be given an exemption for one-term due to many being unable to access an ID card as of yet

- Women must be able to vote independently, without being accompanied by a spouse or relative

The clear objectives for women's participation in 2016 that civil society actors must work towards:

- Increasing the number of women voters (as women generally vote for women)
- Continue with capacity building of women i.e. awareness training on coalitions, avoiding male influences, being independent.
- Encouraging stronger unity and collegiality between INGOs, NGOs and CSOs. To ensure the foundations for future transparent elections could be laid;
- To determine & define the differences between electoral breaches & fraud (crime)
- To increase electoral oversight and accountability
- To review the legal mechanisms and laws associated with electoral processes



Day 2 – Press Conference for Presentation of the ‘Kabul Declaration 2015’

The press conference on 16 December 2015 was attended by a wide range of people from the international community, Afghan civil society, women’s organizations and the diplomatic corp. Notably, the meeting featured H.E. Ambassador Henk Jan Bakker, Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, as the chief guest. During his address on the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, Ambassador Bakker stated, “A vision without action is a dead dream.” This serves as a poignant reminder for the need for Afghanistan to continue to actively progress its 1325 National Action Plan. Such overwhelming support for women’s political and electoral participation in Afghanistan by local and international stakeholders alike is crucial in progressing this pressing issue.

“Women need peace and peace needs women.”

**H.E. Henk Jan Bakker,
Ambassador of the
Kingdom of the Netherlands
to Afghanistan**

Following H.E. Bakker’s address, Ms. Zahra Sepehr from DSAWCO presented the Kabul Declaration 2015. This document outlines the challenges and opportunities for civil society in 2015, and provides a list of requests to the Afghanistan Government, the international community and other civil society stakeholders.

The Director of Gender Concerns International, Ms Sabra Bano, concluded the proceedings by highlighting the resiliency and tenacity of both Afghan women and Afghan civil society. Moreover, she outlined the advances in women’s rights and participation that have already been made; especially since the first Kabul Declaration in 2009. That particular document reflected Afghan women’s commitment to having a 1325 National Action Plan, something that is now a reality.

