

Afghan Youth Debates: New President Must Build National Unity

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President Hamed Karzai's successor must work on building a sense of national unity in Afghanistan, an IWPR debate has heard.

Naser Amini, a senior lecturer at Balkh University in the north of the country, told students that ethnic divisions had been allowed to dominate Afghan politics for too long.

During an hour-long discussion held in Mazar-e Sharif on May 1, Amini called on Afghans to look beyond their own particular regional interests and instead view their country as a single, unified entity.

He urged the government to design programmes to help remove ethnic tensions and promote a more cohesive political order that is equally representative of all.

"We need time to concentrate on solving ethnic divisions and our government should do more work in this regard," he told the audience. "Unfortunately, the current quota of power has separated different Afghan ethnic groups from one another."

A large number of ethnic groups live in Afghanistan, with the Pashtuns concentrated largely in the south and east of the country, Tajiks and Hazaras as the second and third largest communities, respectively, and Uzbeks, Turkmen and other smaller groups making up the remainder.

Rajab Ibrahim, a political analyst and a guest speaker at the debate, said he believed discrimination and a sense of mistrust between the various groups had been accentuated by the policies of successive governments.

He argued that the current political structure still encouraged Afghans to think along ethnic lines. Historically, Afghan politics has been dominated by Pashtuns, with almost all heads of state, including Karzai, coming from that group.

"The state has failed to prove to the people that it acts equally towards all of its citizens," Ibrahim told undergraduates. He added that "the double standards practiced by government officials" had led people to expect an element of ethnic bias in decision-making.

Mortaza Faramand, a social affairs analyst and a panellist at the debate, went on to address the extent of youth participation in the first round of the presidential and provincial council elections held on April 5.

He said young people proved to the world that they wanted a say in the future shape of the nation.

"Young people must break free of traditions and make their presence felt in all areas of life," he said. "Having faith in our young people means having faith in the future."

Sakhi Dad Mahdiyar is a student at Balkh University and an IWPR trainee.

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