

## **Afghanistan: Ways Forward to Peace**

**Author:** [IWPR Afghanistan](#)

Debate hears recommendations for bringing long-term stability and social justice.

The conclusions of a long-running IWPR project on way to build peace in Afghanistan have been presented at a public event in the capital Kabul.

Some 200 people, including university students, journalists, political experts and representatives of various NGOs, took part in the September 20 debate at the Intercontinental Hotel.

After suffering more than three decades of war, Afghan now faces the challenge of negotiating with the armed opposition. Although the High Peace Council has been working for the last six years to facilitate talks, there has been little progress.

**Afghan Reconciliation: Promoting Peace and Building Trust by Engaging Civil Society** was designed to involve communities in active discussions about peace-building, human rights and reconciliation as the keys to a stable, functioning society.

IWPR project manager Munir Mehraban told attendees that the programme had reached around 20,000 people across the country in the course of the 200 debates it has held over the past two years.

He explained that the main messages they had encountered were that efforts to bring peace were more advanced on a local than on a national level, with the government stymied by the lack of a unified approach. Alliances were unclear, while opposition politicians often lacked commitment in the process. Poverty and unemployment were also major challenges, making young men vulnerable to recruitment by the insurgents.

The event also heard from a number of experts and politicians, with audience members encouraged to put their own questions.

Khalilullah Safi is head of the Afghanistan branch of Pugwash, an international organisation promoting peace worldwide.

Negotiations were important, he said, because contrary to popular opinion the Taliban did not answer to outside forces such as Pakistan, where the leadership is based.

Safi added that Pugwash had organised several conferences involving countries such as the UAE, Qatar, Japan, France, and Germany as well as Afghan politicians and Taliban representatives.

"If Taliban are [based] in Pakistan nowadays due to some issues, we shouldn't say that they obey Pakistan's orders. The Taliban are independent and have the right to make their own decisions. If the problem is that they are in Pakistan, then the mujahedin also lived in Pakistan during the war with the Soviet Union, but they didn't get any orders from Pakistanis."

Parwan governor Asim Asim, himself a former mujahedin, disagreed strongly with Safi.

"First of all, the Taliban are terrorists, are not independent, and cannot make their own decisions," he said.

"Secondly, comparing the mujahedin with the Taliban is incorrect, taking into account the global and regional political situation in those days. The mujahedin were supported by the international community and the jihad in Afghanistan was considered lawful by Islamic scholars, while the Taliban's fight is not legal at all. The jihadi leaders were all independent and took their own decisions while the Taliban are not like that."

Balkh university lecturer Jamshid Fardin, a veteran IWPR debate participant, said that unemployment was a major factor driving young men to join the armed opposition. He recounted how he had heard this himself.

"When an educated youth joined the insurgents, he was asked why he had opted to rebel against the government," he said.

"The young man answered that he had a master's degree and had worked at government organisations for some time, but then another young man who had less education than him but was supported by local powerbrokers was hired and he was fired. After a long period of unemployment, he was forced to join the insurgents."

Kabul university student Saifurrahman Samim agreed that people had no trust in officials because of pervasive corruption throughout government. He asked the panel how peace could be brought under such circumstances.

Monira Yusufzada, the spokeswoman of the Independent Directorate of Local Governance, responded that there was no doubt that corruption diminished public trust in government. However, fighting it was a national project that everyone needed to take part in.

“The government alone cannot eliminate corruption unless the public cooperates with them,” she concluded.

Another Kabul university student, Waqif Baligh, asked whether there was social justice for people living in more peaceful parts of Afghanistan.

Parwan governor Mohammed Asim explained that there was no rule of law in regions ruled by the Taliban. The government, on the other hand, tried to bring justice to all in areas they controlled, regardless of tribe or ethnicity.

“We can claim that there is relative justice in areas that have relative peace,” he said.

Logar governor Mohammad Halim Fidae agreed that peace was impossible without social justice.

“Unless all groups are given their fair share of power, and unless there is understanding among political parties, bringing peace and security will be undoubtedly prove impossible.”

“This debate allowed ordinary Afghans to share their expectations and viewpoints with the local authorities, and make the government understand that Afghans need peace more than anything else,” Mehraban concluded. “This debate made it clear that the peace talks conducted by the government for the last six years have not been on the right track.”

Ozra Aziz Ahmadi, a civil society activist in Herat, said that IWPR was the only organisation that was able to deliver such educational campaigns even in the most remote areas of Afghanistan.

“These debates are very useful for public awareness,” she continued. “Such debates decrease the distance between the people and the government and they get closer to each other.”

Women’s rights campaigner Hamida Wardak agreed that IWPR’s activities set a benchmark within the activist community.

“The debates that IWPR has conducted are very effective and informative. They reflect how people really think.”

**Location:** [Afghanistan](#)

**Topic:** [Peace](#)

**Focus:** [Project Highlight](#)

---

**Source URL:** <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/afghanistan-ways-forward-peace>