

## **Afghans and Nepalese Share Views on Conflict**

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Activists agree that civic engagement and social justice are key to ensuring stability.

Afghan and Nepalese experts had a rare chance to share their experiences of living in societies struggling to recover from conflict at an on-line IWPR event.

Afghanistan has suffered through more than three decades of war, and now faces the challenge of peace talks with the Taleban.

Nepal experienced a ten-year civil war that claimed 17,000 lives and displaced around 100,000 people. It ended with a 2006 peace deal between the government and the Communist insurgents, but speakers said that they too were still working to ensure political stability.

The July debate was held via Skype between participants in Nepal and Afghans in the city of Herat in the west of the country.

Speakers all agreed that civil society had to take an active role in solving the problems of conflict.

Afghan participants also stressed that the international community, especially the USA, had to play a central part in bringing peace as well as good governance to their country.

Chandani Pandey, a sociology lecturer at King Katmandu university in the Nepalese capital, said that peace in her country had been achieved after overcoming four difficult stages.

“First we made the country’s system receptive toward peace, then we achieved social stability with the support of civil society. After that, we divided political power fairly - and finally, we analysed all our country’s shortcomings and negative points and planned reforms on that basis.”

Nepalese civil rights activist Aleena said that Afghans also needed to engage in a public debate to understand the reasons behind their protracted conflicts.

She said it was impossible to solve conflict without identifying the solutions, causes and consequences of violence.

Herat provincial council member Habib-Ul-Rahman Pedram said that ongoing violence in Afghanistan was largely due to interference by other regional powers.

Abdul Qadar Rahimi, head of the regional office of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), agreed.

He said that the 2014 withdrawal of coalition forces would delay the peace process for many years, with the resulting vacuum fueling a regional competition over power and energy resources.

“Our first war was between Mujahedeen and the then-government,” he continued. “The second Afghan war was against the Taleban. The third war was between Hamid Karzai’s government and the Taleban, and the fourth war is between Islamic State and the current government of Afghanistan, which has not ended yet.”

Nepal’s Commissioner for Human Rights, Geta Sheresta, told the debate that she believed peace had to mean more than the absence of war.

Different people had different definitions depending on their situation, she continued.

“In my view, peace is safety and a situation where no shots and explosions are heard and where a person can live in complete security,” she said.

Mandira Rawat, the founder and head of the Nepalese Utsah training centre, agreed that the Kabul government needed to hold consultations with the nation. She emphasised the role civil society had played in bringing peace to Nepal, particularly through campaigning for changes in the country’s constitution.

Rawat also stressed that implementing justice in society paved the way to long-lasting stability, adding, “The Afghan government should strengthen the fundamentals of justice among all parts and tribes of the nation in order to bring peace.”

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