

## **Warnings Over Afghanistan's Unofficial Madrassas**

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Calls for government oversight to avoid young men and women being radicalised.

Large numbers of unregistered madrassas, or religious schools, operating in Afghanistan may be serving as a source of extremist recruitment, according to speakers at a series of IWPR debates.

Public events held in August and September heard that the government urgently needed to crack down on institutions with no specific curriculum and no official oversight.

In Nangarhar, officials said that fully two thirds of the province's 1,500 madrasas were not registered with the government and operated without permits.

"My department is trying its best to register these madrasas and monitor their lessons," said Mawlawi Abdul Zahir Haqani, head of the provincial department of haj and religious affairs. He added that he did not believe that radicalisation was a problem in such schools.

However, another religious scholar, Mawlawi Atiqurrahman, said the madrasas and mosques in areas outside government control did serve as a recruiting tool for extremists.

"In the areas that are under insurgent influence, people are incited against the government and encouraged to support terrorism."

In Kunar, religious scholar Mawlawi Najibullah Haqyar said that unregistered madrasas had led to a state of anarchy.

"They are fronts for war against this government. Anyone who accepts citizenship of this country and should implement and respect all its rules."

Others argued that such schools were being exploited by outside forces to fuel ongoing conflict in their country.

Mohammad Omar Sati, head of the peace secretariat in Kandahar province, argued that graduates of madrasas in Pakistan had been among the insurgent fighters in Afghanistan.

"Pakistan also wants to bring the unofficial madrasas in Afghanistan under its control and use them against the Afghan government," he said.

Parwan provincial council member Hasiba Hift, said, "Interfering countries like Pakistan use such madrasas to change young people's mindsets by provoking them against the government. "

She added, "Students are fed anti-government propaganda in unofficial madrasas and brainwashed in order to prepare them to carry out acts of terror."

In Logar province, debate participants said that the government had an important role to play in monitoring such institutions.

Mohammad Qasim Khoshiwal, deputy head of the Logar's provincial council, said that it was only natural that an Islamic country such as Afghanistan had a large number of religious schools.

But order had to be imposed from above, he continued.

"Peace will be possible when all the religious madrassas are registered and an effective system is used to monitor them," Khoshiwal said.

In Kapisa province, debate participant Shukrullah Mohammadi suggested that Kabul establish a central body to oversee the schools.

"The government should set up a control centre in order to coordinate and unify the messages of religious leaders in the mosques," he said, noting that this had been one of the recommendations made at IWPR's Kabul Peace Conference held earlier this year.

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

**Topic:** Youth

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