

Update on women, peace and security in Afghanistan November 28th 2016

The Informal Expert Group of the Security Council on Women, Peace and Security met on **13 July 2016** to discuss the situation in Afghanistan, with the participation of the leadership of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the United Nations Country Team. A comprehensive background note was prepared for the meeting and a record of the meeting was issued as [S/2016/673](#). The group resolved to reconvene before the end of the year. Below is a non-exhaustive list of **relevant developments since then**.

Since the IEG met to discuss the situation in Afghanistan, there has been a sharp increase in the return of Afghan refugees and undocumented Afghans and an increase in security incidents, including the deadliest single incident recorded by the UN in Afghanistan since 2001, claimed by ISIL. The Warsaw Summit in July and the Brussels Conference in October sent a strong message that the international community will support Afghanistan's security and development at near or existing levels through 2020.

The Security Council discussed Afghanistan on 14th September, and adopted its first [presidential statement \(PRST\) on Afghanistan](#) since 2014. Though the PRST did not reference gender equality and women's empowerment, as well as protection issues related to women, they were prominent themes at the debate. In particular, the Afghan PR noted that "the empowerment of women will continue in all aspects of Afghan society, including service in the ANDSF and political processes, as well as the full implementation of Afghanistan's national action plan on resolution 1325" and that "there are more women in senior Government positions now than at any other time in Afghan history. Among them there are four ministers, nine deputy ministers, one governor, one deputy head of the High Peace Council and a number of senior diplomats at a leadership level." Out of the 28 speakers at the debate, half of them brought up issues related to gender equality, and many made them a central theme of their statements. These included:

- Multiple mentions of the Afghan National Action Plan on 1325 (2015-2022) and the National Strategy on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (2016-2020).
- Welcoming progress on girls' access to health care and education, stronger legal protection for women and girls from violence, and increased participation in public life, and the need to make these trends irreversible.
- Concerns about human rights violations against women and girls, deep-rooted discrimination against women and their fundamental rights and freedoms, and the impact of extreme poverty on women and girls.
- Importance of ensuring women's effective participation and representation in political decision making processes, including the peace process and elections, and increasing the number of women recruited into the ranks of the ANDSF.
- Calls for new legislation banning child marriage and harmful practices like *bachah-bazi*.
- Calls for stronger analysis and sex-disaggregated data on gender equality issues in periodic briefings to the Council.
- References to each country's commitment to, and investment on women's empowerment as central to development and peacebuilding in Afghanistan.
- References to the previous briefing of the Informal Experts Group on Women, Peace and Security.

Shortly after the first IEG meeting on Afghanistan, **UN Women's Executive Director visited Afghanistan** and met with key interlocutors in government, the international community, and civil society. During consultations in the Working Group on Women, Peace and Security, a vibrant forum with monthly meetings of up to 60 participants spanning government, donors, UN, and civil society, the Executive Director was asked to relay several concerns. These included the following: a limited number of women -only 3- were part of the 50-member delegation to the Warsaw Summit; large sums are devoted to support the security sector without specific budget provisions to increase women's effective participation in decision-making in this sector; investments on gender equality and the

implementation of the NAP on SCR 1325 pale in comparison with the funds spent on capacity building of the armed forces; women's participation in the "first phase" or preliminary peace talks is sometimes deflected by commitments to their participation at a later stage; and impunity for violence against women continues and there is no serious protection for women's human rights defenders, who are the target of rampant threats. Women's organizations have called for at least one of the five deputies of the National Security Council Advisor to be a woman, and for stronger investments in raising the visibility and voices/participation of young Afghan women.

Preparation on gender equality issues for the **Brussels Conference** yielded positive results, including support for the National Action Plan on 1325 as one of the 24 deliverables agreed by the Afghan Government and the international community. This included a focus on women's economic empowerment in the preliminary presentation to donors of sectoral development plans, a position paper developed by the WPS Working Group, a comprehensive mapping of women, peace and security projects in Afghanistan, the participation of women leaders in the delegation to Brussels, and the organization of side events at the conference itself focused on this theme.

From 1 January to 30 September, **casualty figures** include 877 women, which represents a 12 per cent decrease over last year. A significant majority of casualties continue to be attributed to anti-government elements, although the percentage of those caused by government forces, including air strikes, increased. The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission registered a 4 per cent increase in **child marriage**, documenting 235 cases of girls married between March 2015 and March 2016. The practice of *bachah-bazi* is yet to be banned and criminalized. Shortly after the IEG met in July, two women were executed by anti-government elements accused of moral crimes, and the head of the Department of Women's Affairs in Ghazni was attacked. Since the beginning of 2016, UNAMA has documented a sharp increase in instances of **parallel justice mechanisms**, which result in the killing and physical punishment of women.

During the past four months, the Ministry of Finance and Foreign Affairs have prepared a costing and budget plan for the 1325 NAP; the Wolesi Jirga have approved a law on the elimination of harassment against women and girls, which will now be presented to the Meshrano Jirga; and the National Security Council has established a Gender and Human Rights Directorate to increase the participation of women in this government body. Civil society activists participated in this year's **Open Day on Women, Peace and Security**, which took place in [Kabul on October 26th](#) and in 13 provinces, with more than 400 participants, and focusing on the role of women in countering violent extremism. Notably, even though there is a great deal of attention in Afghanistan to this issue, none of the projects included in the recent mapping on women, peace and security have focused on countering violent extremism.

In her opening of preliminary investigations in Afghanistan, the ICC Prosecutor included gender-based persecution as a crime against humanity allegedly committed by the Taliban against "women and girls who worked, took part in public affairs, or attended school past the age of puberty." The ICC has not yet prosecuted anyone for gender-based persecution, which is a new crime under the Rome Statute. The Office of the Prosecutor also noted that there were reasons to believe that Afghan authorities have committed sexual violence-related war crimes in relation to detainees.

Recommendations for the Security Council

The extensive provisions on gender equality and women's protection and empowerment in UNAMA's mandate, which comes up for renewal in March 2017, should be maintained, as they both support and reflect the work and attention of international and national actors on these important issues. This should include supporting women's meaningful participation in any future talks with the Taliban, as well as decision-making bodies involved in the peace process, including during informal and formal peace negotiations.

The IEG should collaborate closely with the Counter-terrorism Committee of the Security Council to ensure that women's effective participation, and that stronger gender analysis and information inform the CTC's thematic assessments, visits, and technical assistance recommendations on Afghanistan.

The IEG could request specific information from UNAMA on challenges and concrete measures taken or planned to address the significantly low representation of women in UNAMA's overall staff –especially national staff– and in leadership positions; on the gender advisory expertise in the mission, in light of the 2014 merger of the Gender Advisor Unit and the Office of Human Rights; and progress in mainstreaming gender across all mission components.