

## ***How to Bury the Hatchet – Efforts to Reconcile***

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This conference on peace building in Afghanistan, hosted by the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan, is the first sincere and great event after the Bonn Conference where representatives from Afghanistan and the international community could openly discuss fear, mistakes but also success concerning the situation in Afghanistan. This is the first time for representatives from Afghanistan to listen to the international community and hear its views. In previous meetings outside Afghanistan, there has only been discussion about achievements, which is not quite the correct subject to discuss, because real achievements are still to be obtained.

There is a certain message that needs to come through to the international community about local authority, local community and the role that women have when it comes to peace building in Afghanistan. Surely every part involved in this process of building up the country wants reconciliation, rebuilding peace, but these actors tend to forget or ignore the role of the local community of Afghanistan. The government in the country has forgotten the local community, it is more involved in communication with the international community about its own interests rather than focusing on the local level. This can be seen in the writings of Ahmed Rashid, where the situation in Afghanistan and the role of the local community are explained. If it is ignored and not informed about what is going on, if it does not have any power, how could it understand what is going on and how could peace building efforts then be carried out? Now the discussion takes place only on top level, and only some of the Afghanistan issues are discussed locally, but then in the local governments and not within the local communities.

The wisdom of civil society has been ignored, it has not been valued. Civil society activities must be emphasized, but neither the international community nor the government has paid much attention to them, although they can contribute to the peace building in Afghanistan. In Bonn, however, there were in fact two conferences going on, one about politics and another about

civil society. It was the first time Afghan communities were mentioned as civil society actors.

Compared to the situation seven years ago, there are of course differences in the civil society as well as in the government now. But without being too negative about the situation, it has to be pointed out that more actions need to be taken. Vulnerable groups still feel that no one is listening to them. Afghans have for decades grown up and lived under conflict, some fled to Pakistan and some came back, and in spite of all these difficulties, the international community expects Afghanistan to be peaceful. But there are things that have to be done to bring peace in Afghanistan.

In terms of peace building and reconciliation, the active role of civil society and the communities should not be forgotten. Without their participation, the international community cannot bring peace to the country. The majority of the people have been involved in killing, fighting and other horrible things during the thirty years of war. They now stand without education, without support, and there is no one there to advocate for peace building and reconciliation, to bring them together. During the past twenty years, the people of Afghanistan have been divided and belonged to different groups under the rule of a warlord, for example Mujahedin. There was a lack of awareness in the Afghan community, people followed different groups without knowing their role or their aim. These groups did a lot of talking, but when all was said and done they were working for their own benefit.

There are some examples of a few organisations working with peace building to be mentioned. They show what the local community, especially women, expect from the international community and how to rebuild peace in Afghanistan.

One example is The Afghan Women Skills Development Center (AWSDC), which is working on community level with peace education, a very necessary and important matter. There are many conflicts in the society, even within families. Family members may belong to different groups, and nothing has been done to bring them together. No one has paid attention to the problem how to create trust and build peace among Afghans, not

even the international community. If that is ignored then there will not be any peace across the whole nation.

After 9/11, it seemed that the situation in Afghanistan would change positively. Because of the dramatic event, people all over the world and across the country came together to bring peace to Afghanistan. The Afghans were fed up with war, killings, fighting and they expected to get peace in their country. But after two or three years, the situation started to get worse day by day. It is sad to be obliged to say that, since the theme of this conference is reconciliation and peace building.

Nobody knows who is a Talib, since there is no recognition of Taliban and Talibanism. Ahmed Rashid wrote in his book about which kind of people become Taliban, and why they choose that path. It has to do with the situation in the country, that people lack education, awareness and is under the influence of warlords. But it is mainly due to the fact that nobody gives enough attention to the situation and to the people, which has made the civilians an easy target for the fundamentalist groups.

The government of Afghanistan only has authority that covers the capital Kabul and a few central provinces, not the whole country. It also ignores people's needs and therefore they are now becoming Taliban. This is happening in Afghanistan as well as in Pakistan. These people do not have access to basic human rights, they do not even know what rights they have. They do not have access to education, to receiving help or justice. But how could they have justice when there is no justice even in Kabul or in the government?

How can this problem be solved and people come together?

There are some suggestions for how to build peace from the views of the people and especially of the women. Firstly, awareness has to be raised among the population, and education has to be the main priority, human rights must be advocated for so that people know about their rights. If the people are not educated or informed, they will not continue on the right path. Today even the international community and the donor agencies, whether they are implementing their operations through local organisations or by themselves, in order to reach conciliation,

have to negotiate with the Taliban, because the government does not have any power in many areas and the people want to stay alive and have access to food and water.

The Afghan people need to have trust and support from the international community. During the past seven years donors have not shown much interest in peace building in Afghanistan. Only a few organisations have been working in a few parts of the country, and there have been some events organised, like celebrating Peace Day on September 21. Local organisations cannot work without support from the international community, and the international community must show its interest and come together, it must show a clear agenda and work objectively in Afghanistan.

During the years after the fall of Taliban regime, Afghanistan has seen lots of efforts and support coming into the country. But there was no success, peace and justice have not been established. Local authorities and effectiveness have been ignored as well as the role of more than sixty percent of the population, namely Afghan women. The Afghan government has begun to negotiate, as Afghans are thirsty for peace. This is positive, but there is no effort to introduce women into these actions; women's points of view are not heard. Local organisations need to raise their voices at that level together with all other stakeholders, like local communities and especially women. If the international community is interested in bringing peace and reconciliation to Afghanistan it must let them participate in the peace process.

Another concern is that there are warlords among the leaders of the country. They are in power because they are getting support from abroad. There is no fighting going on among the people in the country, but there is fighting between other countries which affects Afghanistan and the Afghan people, who are suffering. This has implications on the peace building process.

It must again be emphasized that the international community should come together and make its agenda clear to all Afghan people, both on national and local levels. In order to build trust among the population, who now do not know what is going on,

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the international community must clarify its agenda and strategy for its work in Afghanistan.

The Afghans, and not least the women, who have passed all their time, all their life, in war and conflict say that now it is enough, now it is time for peace.