

Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs

1995 Nobel Peace Prize

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Pugwash meeting on “Peace and Security in Afghanistan”

23-24 January 2016, Doha, Qatar

(Report by Paolo Cotta-Ramusino, Secretary General of Pugwash)

On 23-24 January 2016, approximately 55 senior participants from a wide range of backgrounds gathered in Doha to discuss the shared goal of peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan. The meeting was a non-official (“academic”) exploration of current issues and not an official negotiation. It was held in the spirit of mutual respect and non-discrimination. All participants recognized the importance of dialogue, and many had traveled very far to participate in these discussions. The hope is that the points discussed in these non-official meetings be considered by all official negotiations. All expressed appreciation to the government of Qatar for allowing this meeting to take place and for the relevant support. There is a unanimous consensus that these meetings should be continued on a regular basis.

The goal of the meeting was to explore the options for a ladder or steps toward a stable peace in an independent, unified Afghanistan that would reflect the values, including Islamic values, of the people of Afghanistan, while recognizing the diversity of the Afghans. Discussions showed that there were many shared concerns. These areas of commonality create opportunities for progress. Dialogue is needed to determine the steps forward to addressing these concerns.

1. Peace is an urgent need. Decades of war that have been imposed on Afghanistan, have had a devastating impact on all Afghans. People are waiting impatiently for peace. If progress is not made soon, many fear the country may face other threats that might further complicate the process.
2. Military confrontation must end. The sovereignty of Afghanistan and the desired peace and stability will ultimately be achieved via political cooperation within a framework of legitimacy established by an appropriate constitution. Foreign troops must eventually leave Afghanistan.
3. Some participants believe that the Constitution should be amended, while others believe that the constitution should be substantially rewritten. Concrete proposals should be discussed in detail in future meetings.
4. Outside forces should not control the politics of Afghanistan. Instead, international technical, economic and cultural cooperation should be promoted.
5. The freedom for all parties to discuss the path to peace needs to be ensured from now on. The highest priority in this regard is enabling all sides to sit together. Blacklists should be eliminated and freedom of movement should be guaranteed. Visas should be facilitated for those to attend such discussions. All agreed that the Taliban should have an office and an address.

6. To foster dialogue among all parties, some participants invoked Afghanistan's long-established tradition of the Jirga. A peace Jirga of credible, impartial Afghans could be convened, perhaps drawn from participants at this conference. Other institutions, such as Pugwash, could also provide a forum, but Afghans must lead. It was pointed out that the Doha dialogue and its follow-ups do not interfere with the current quadrilateral talks.
7. A ceasefire should be part of negotiations.
8. The protection of civilians and an end to civilian casualties are shared goals and high priorities. The recent increase in civilian casualty rates, including the heavy toll on children and women, was noted. All sides should ensure accountability and the prosecution of abuses.
9. Constitutional issues are of primary concern and need to be discussed in specific detail. Afghanistan should have an Islamic government. According to some participants, the present constitution needs to be changed, provided that it be based on Islam and enforce national sovereignty. A fundamental concern is that any constitution should ensure there will be no monopoly of power and no discrimination against people with different religions and backgrounds.
10. It was noted that peace can create a better environment for economic development, which will benefit all the people of Afghanistan. The role of civil society, freedom of expression, and education according to Islamic principles in achieving these goals was agreed.
11. The activities that are performed under the name of Daesh in Afghanistan are a foreign phenomenon and are rejected by the Afghan people.
12. All emphasize the need to uphold the rights of women, and to end violence against women. Some believe these points need to be very clearly defined, and in particular to provide guarantees regarding women's rights. There should be increased accountability for human rights abuses.
13. Health and education issues are a priority independent of the various political positions.
14. Protection of public properties such as schools, medical facilities, and the country's infrastructure is essential. People who commit crimes against them should be prosecuted.
15. There is the need to address the devastation to society from past decades. Drugs, high unemployment and corruption have all taken a high toll on Afghan society. Gains that have been made in terms of increased life expectancy, increased access to health and education, and improvements to the economic structures should be maintained.
16. Threats to society from remnants of war, including unexploded ordnance, must be addressed.
17. All sides share the desire for future engagement with the outside world, and welcome friendship and cooperation with the international community based on mutual respect. Support from the international community in helping to build up Afghanistan, including its roads and schools, will be welcomed by all sides.
18. Participants expressed the strong desire of continuing the series of meetings like the two recent Pugwash meetings in Doha.