



THE AFGHANISTAN IMPASSE CALLS FOR A VICTIM-CENTERED APPROACH, WITH JUSTICE AS THE CATALYST FOR NATIONAL RECONCILIATION¹

In light of the upcoming United Nations conference, which is focused on finding ways to reintegrate Afghanistan into the international system, it is imperative to recognize the unique position and needs of all Afghan citizens who have endured over four decades of violent conflict, experiencing mass human rights violations. The UN Secretary General's report to the Security Council, prepared under resolution 2679 (2023), underscores the necessity of a national political dialogue aimed, among other things, at reconciliation among the nation's citizens, laying the groundwork for a "secure, stable, prosperous, and inclusive Afghanistan."

Reconciliation is impossible without a truth-telling and justice process. Afghanistan's journey towards reconciliation, democracy, stability, and prosperity is intricately tied to addressing past and present human rights atrocities and the needs of victims. Any process aimed at finding a solution for Afghanistan must guarantee the representation of victims, taking into account their needs and expectations for justice. We therefore emphasize the crucial significance of embracing a victim-centered approach in all discussions and processes related to Afghanistan's present and future. It is crucial to ensure that the voices of victims are not merely heard but are central to the dialogue and decision-making processes, paving the way for a genuinely inclusive and just resolution and honoring the sufferings and experiences of all Afghans.

Reflecting on past lessons, particularly the Bonn Conference (2001), we must acknowledge the misguided separation of justice and stability, wherein achieving a political agreement was prioritized at the expense of justice, which was deemed a 'luxury' that Afghanistan cannot afford. This perspective impeded the chance to break the cycle of violence and establish lasting peace. By sidelining justice, Afghanistan forfeited both justice and peace. We must move beyond the false dichotomy of stability versus justice and recognize that both are necessary for sustainable peace in Afghanistan.

Noting that the UN conference in Doha (18-19 February 2024) is not inclusive, we urge all involved parties to commit to a framework that places victims at the heart of reconciliation and nation-building efforts. This commitment should ensure the active participation of victims in the upcoming rounds of talks. Only through a steadfast commitment to justice and a victim-centered approach can Afghanistan hope to move beyond the shadows of conflict and heal.

¹ About the TJCG: The Transitional Justice Coordination Group (TJCG) is a coalition of human rights organizations active in the field of transitional justice in Afghanistan. The TJCG was formed in 2008 with the aim of strengthening advocacy and strategic coordination between organizations involved in transitional justice in Afghanistan. Since its inception, the group has been active and outspoken on transitional justice issues including accountability for mass atrocities committed against the civilian populations in Afghanistan and has dedicated itself to raising the voices of Afghanistan's victims of war and oppression.