

Civil Society Forum

Prior to the International Foreign Ministers' Conference on Afghanistan

1. Background

On December 5, 2011, the International Foreign Ministers' Conference on Afghanistan will take place in Bonn. The German Federal Government hereby meets Afghan President Hamid Karzai's request, which was addressed to Chancellor Angela Merkel at the November 2010 NATO summit in Lisbon. The conference will be held under Afghan leadership. **The aim of the Foreign Ministers' Conference** will be to elaborate on the further process of "handing over responsibility." According to the federal government, this means:

- Review the progress of the transition process to date and draw conclusions to improve the civilian aspect of the transition through 2014.
- Agree on the international community's long-term commitment in Afghanistan and its region after 2014 and
- Exchange ideas about the political processes' continuing course in Afghanistan and the region, in which the national dimension of this process (in particular the desired reconciliation process) is considered as an internal Afghan matter.

All topics essentially affect the interests of the entire Afghan population, i.e. including the non-state actors in Afghanistan. In order to achieve a high degree of legitimacy and to arrive at an outcome that also takes into account civil society's position, it is necessary to involve Afghan civil society in the decision-making processes regarding Afghanistan's future.

Against this background, the Federal Foreign Office and the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development proposed to the German political foundations that they initiate and organise a process to involve Afghan civil society prior to the official Foreign Ministers' Conference. The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) has, jointly with the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) and the Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung (hbs), agreed to this proposal. The Friedrich-Naumann-Foundation for Freedom (FNF) has likewise expressed its willingness to provide an organisational and financial contribution to this process. VENRO, the umbrella organisation of development-focussed non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Germany, has agreed to support the involvement of Afghan civil society actors.

2. The Process to Involve Afghan Civil Society Organisations

The process to involve Afghan civil society organisations is divided into two phases:

In phase one, the "Afghanistan Activities," which is to take place in Afghanistan, interested representatives of Afghan civil society will participate in an inclusive and transparent consultation process. The aim is to develop policy recommendations for the Foreign Ministers' Con-

ference and beyond through active participation of Afghan civil society institutions. The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and the Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung will focus their efforts on the Afghanistan Activities. The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung will be involved in this process as an equal partner. The leadership and decision-making responsibilities will lie with the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC).

In phase two, the resulting policy recommendations will be presented and communicated at a Civil Society Forum in Germany, which will take place prior to the Foreign Ministers' Conference, and which will be organised by the KAS, in close coordination and cooperation with the FES, the hbs, and the FNF.

2.1 The Afghanistan Activities

Representatives of the FES and the hbs in Afghanistan, with cooperation from the KAS, will initiate and support an inclusion and consultation process for Afghan NGOs and other social actors. The German Embassy in Kabul will support this process. The **aim of the Afghanistan Activities** is to prepare the Afghan civil society for the Foreign Ministers' Conference in Bonn, i.e.:

- To bring together representatives of civil society and enable discussions about the continuing political process, with the aim of agreeing on policy recommendations to be addressed to the Afghan government, through supports of International Community.
- The policy recommendations should outline the expectations from the Foreign Ministers' Conference as well as the positions and demands regarding the broader political process.
- The policy recommendations will be collected through two conferences and a series of regional consultations in Afghanistan.
- The common political recommendations should be agreed upon no later than October 31st, since it is planned that the important aspects of the policy recommendations will be communicated to the Afghan government prior to the Foreign Ministers' Conference.
- The goal is to influence the official negotiating position of the Afghan government delegation and in the best case scenario, to make some of the political recommendations the key positions in the negotiations.
- At the same time, the collected policy recommendations will also be sent to the foreign ministries that will participate in the Foreign Ministers' Conference.
- Further opportunities to distribute the policy recommendations (e.g. to Afghan, German and international media as well as NGOs represented in Afghanistan) will be checked.
- As a result, the Afghanistan Activities will produce a group of 34 Afghan civil society representatives to participate in the Civil Society Forum in Bonn.
- In addition, the group should have agreed on two representatives who will attend the International Foreign Ministers' Conference on December 5th to present the collected

policy recommendations from the Afghan civil society representatives (one woman and one man).

Several aspects within the framework of the Afghanistan Activities are particularly important:

- The lead for the Afghanistan Activities must be conducted by the Afghan organisations (Afghan ownership). Therefore, it is welcomed that the AIHRC has taken the lead role in facilitating the consultation process. The role of the political foundations is solely that of a facilitator and observer.
- The broadest involvement of Afghan NGOs possible should be sought. However, claims to being exhaustive and all-encompassing should in any case be avoided. The recipient of the political recommendations is the Afghan government. The international community can only be an indirect recipient. This complies with the claim of "handing over responsibility."

2.2 Civil Society Forum Prior to the Foreign Ministers' Conference

The Civil Society Forum will take place in Bonn two days before the International Foreign Ministers' Conference and the organisation thereof will be coordinated by KAS. This will be done in close cooperation with and involvement from FES, hbs and FNF.

Of central importance is that the policy recommendations be already developed and finalised during the Afghanistan Activities phase. The forum should serve to present and communicate the contents of the papers. The **aim of the Civil Society Forum** is therefore to provide a public platform for the representatives of Afghan civil society, i.e.:

- Afghan civil society representatives should be afforded the opportunity to publicly present their policy recommendations, so as to communicate their positions vis-à-vis the ongoing political processes, their expectations from the Foreign Ministers' Conference.
- The recipient of this is still primarily the Afghan government.
- In addition, the forum serves to convey the positions of Afghan civil society to the international actors engaged in Afghanistan and to sensitise them towards civil society suggestions, expectation and possible contributions for the future of the country.
- Last, but not least the German and international public, as well as the German and international NGOs that are present in Afghanistan, are also recipients of the policy recommendations.
- The forum is quite explicitly *not* intended to offer German or international NGOs a platform to articulate their own positions.

The forum should offer the possibility to not only present but also to communicate the main content of the policy recommendations. Accordingly, the concept of the forum is as follows:

- The forum will structure and divide the main points of the policy recommendations developed in the Afghanistan Activities phase accordingly into thematic blocks and panels.

- Each of these panels will be comprised of three to four Afghan representatives, who will be given the opportunity to explain their position on the relevant thematic block, provide background information, and where applicable, to make any existing differentiations among the positions of the different actors and to answer any questions that may arise.
- The exact layout of the thematic blocks and the panels remains to be finalised but will most likely follow the thematic layout of the official Afghanistan conference (see above). They depend crucially on the substantive structure of the policy recommendations. In order for the panels to be defined in a timely manner, it is important that the policy recommendations are finalised by October 31st. To allow sufficient time for discussion, there are not more than four panels. Consequently, the policy recommendations should be divided into four overarching themes.
- A serious discussion of the substantive positions of the Afghan civil society representatives is of central importance for the success of the forum. To allow for this, the forum will take place over one and a half days: beginning with an official opening and the first two substantive panels on Friday afternoon, followed by an all-day conference on Saturday, which will include two further substantive panels.
- The second conference day will include an official closing that involves German, Afghan, and if applicable, international government officials.

To that effect, the **planned course of events for the forum** will be as follows:

Friday afternoon

- Opening: The opening will be conducted by a carefully selected, high-ranking German representative, who will welcome the Afghan, German and international guests and explain the process for involving Afghan civil society (Afghanistan Activities and Civil Society Forum).
- Keynote: Following the opening, an Afghan representative will be given the opportunity to explain the process from an Afghan perspective and to make vital, introductory remarks about the collected policy recommendations.
- First and second substantive panels: Three to four Afghan representatives, led by a German or international moderator, present and discuss the main content of the policy recommendations.

Saturday morning

- Third and fourth substantive panels: See above

Saturday afternoon

- Exchange with Afghan, German and if applicable, international government officials.
- Closing of the forum: The forum will conclude with a summary statement from an Afghan representative (again to be elected by the group itself) as well as from a German representative, who is also yet to be named. Here, the policy recommendations, expectations and concerns of the Afghan civil society representatives can be summarised and a final appeal to the Afghan government can be made.

2.3 Participation of two delegates to the Foreign Ministers' Conference

On Monday, December 5, 2011, the International Foreign Ministers' Conference organised by the Federal Foreign Office will take place. This will be attended by two delegates (one woman and one man) from the group of Afghan civil society representatives to present the collected policy recommendations.

In this context, the Federal Foreign Office will actively ensure that the selection of the delegates be made independent from the Afghan government and that the group of Afghan civil society representatives has the sole responsibility for making the selection.

2.4. Press and public relations

To achieve the goal of the overall project and to "provide a voice" to the civil society representatives from Afghanistan, arranging a press conference for German and international media representatives is considered on the second day. Elected representatives from the civil society delegation could provide their views on the policy recommendations, as well as on the project itself.

It is also considered to enable the Forum to be broadcasted. This seems particularly important so that the Afghan television stations can have the opportunity to report about the civil society activities and to inform the Afghan population about the events in Bonn. This will therefore further increase the broad impact and sustainability of civil society engagement in the context of the Foreign Ministers' Conference.

3. Conditions for an overall success

For the success of the overall project, i.e. for the Afghanistan Activities as well as for the forum, the following conditions are of central importance:

- Vital is the inclusiveness and transparency of the process in the context of democratic and human rights-based values. This requires a broad and balanced involvement of Afghan NGOs, however, with the conscious exclusion of radical/extreme actors;
- The inclusiveness also applies for the representative participation of women in this process. The political foundations strongly support the representative participation of women. Nevertheless, this decision is up to the parties involved in the "Afghan Activities".
- "Afghan ownership" of the Afghanistan Activities as well as of the forum; the participating German actors play only a **facilitating and observing** role in the whole process;
- Participation of two independently elected representatives from the Afghan civil society delegation who will have the right to present the collected policy recommendations in the Foreign Ministers' Conference.