

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE PEACE PROCESS

Research Report



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About WCLRF

Women and Children Legal Research Foundation (WCLRF) was established in March 2003 in Kabul, Afghanistan with the aim of fighting injustice and harmful traditions that hurts women and children in Afghanistan. WCLRF's mission is to address all sensitive issues which affect Afghan women and girls' health and welfare. WCLRF's objective is to empower women and children to defend their human rights and access to justice and equality. WCLRF makes every effort to identify women and children's demands across the country, and enhance their voice for advocacy; as well as encourage men to change households and public places as heaven for women and children. WCLRF's policy is based on strengthening women & children and establishing good coordination between social groups to dignify and respect human rights and prevent violence against women and children. WCLRF strives to identify roots and causes of sexual harassment against women and children in Afghanistan and take preventive measures.

One of the main goals of the program is to raise awareness about negative effects of unfair social structures and systems that threaten Afghan women and children's life. Research based advocacy - as an effective tool and a permanent activity, is respected in all documents of the foundations. Though advocacy is a time-consuming process, WCLRF is pleased that its advocacy campaigns had tangible results. For instance, our research on extravagant expenses in weddings and their negative effects on families' economics resulted in social movements to campaign for decreasing these types of expenses. Indeed, such movements wouldn't be possible without coordination with social forces; so social groups and local authorities can be the strong supporters for such initiatives. From WCLRF point of view, cooperation and coordination with social groups improves their capacity to bring positive changes in the society.

This is not the first research WCLRF conducted and will never be; WCLRF has already published several research reports and opened the way for research based advocacy campaigns.

WCLRF publications:

1. Women Access to Justice;
2. Violence against Women;
3. Beating wife (women);
4. Polygamy (multiple marriages) in Afghanistan;
5. Women Economic Independence in Afghanistan;

6. A glance on cases of “running away” from house in Afghanistan;
7. Living situation of under-aged girls in Afghanistan;
8. Early marriages;
9. Physical violence against women in Afghanistan;
10. Women access to heritage;
11. Women political participation in Afghanistan;
12. Access to the right of identification and birth certification in Afghanistan;
13. Extravagant expenses in weddings in Afghanistan;
14. Study impact of proverbs against women in Afghanistan;
15. Violence against Women;
16. A look into the way of children naming in Afghanistan;
17. Waqehat (Reality): a legal and research magazine;
18. “Jurmana” an advocacy film about reform of “Bad” in Afghanistan;
19. Violence against women (documentary);
20. “Education” a spot about girls’ education in Afghanistan;
21. “I am a woman”, a local song clip reflects violence against women in Afghanistan;
22. “Bad” a radio drama;
23. Women access to property and heritage;
24. Heritage and Mehr, two short video clips;
25. Strengthening women and girls’ rights to access social safety under the framework of Violence against Women Law;
26. Right to Vote “women political participation in Afghanistan”;
27. Training Manual “Gender in Economical National Policy”;
28. Training Manual “Heritage and Mehr”;
29. Training Manual “Marriage Registration”
30. Training Manual “Prevent Sexual Harassment against Women and Girls”;
31. A case study, “Identifying the causes and solutions for sexual harassment against women and girls in Afghanistan”

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Abstract

Without women, peace processes are not sustainable, pervasive, or just. Considering gender before, during, and after the peace process is synonymous with overseeing the balance and harmony of the peace. This approach emphasizes female participation and believes in a compromise between the genders when approaching peace, developing expectations of peace, and establishing pre-conditions in peace processes. This gender-inclusive approach allows men and women to participate equally in peacebuilding and contribute equally to the implementation of peace programs; this participation should allow both men and women the independence to express their needs for a peacebuilding process, as opposed to creating a predominantly male discussion that women simply uphold. Therefore, while a peace process will never be ideal, we can say that a gender-responsive peace process has the potential to contribute to a comprehensive peace process that is as fair and balanced as possible. A peace that is based on the omission, denial, and subjugation of women would be fragile; the peace would be simply prejudice, as well as promote violence against women and the repetition of a chain of violence and conflicts. In addition to examining the participation of women in peace processes, it is important to also look at the deliverables of a peace agreement. In one part of the research, “peace” and “peace process” should be defined.

This perception implies the need for women’s participation in peace processes, and for women’s participation in peace processes to appear in responsibilities standards. In this research, efforts have been made to review women’s current participation in peace processes and focus on the roles they play in these processes. Based on the research findings, women’s participation in peace processes is deemed a pre-requisite for ideal, fair, and balanced peacebuilding conditions, in which women play different roles, such as negotiators, monitors, strategic planners, and program designers. But in current official peace processes, women’s participation is paltry and ineffective, both at the national level of the High Peace Council and in provincial peace councils. While women are playing active and effective roles in informal peace processes, women are facing serious barriers and challenges to formal participation. Primary barriers and challenges to bringing more women into the peace process include the governing mentality in the High Peace Council, resistance of the Taliban to women’s presence, and the lack of women in peace processes currently.

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Chapter One; Overview and Research Methodology

Introduction

The peace talks occurring simultaneously alongside the Afghanistan's recent conflicts have served as a discussion point for finding a solution to the problem of women's involvement in the peacebuilding process. So far, however, these discussions have not been effective, since peace negotiation processes and ceasefires have been frail and failed. This issue raises an important question: Why have the efforts for peace failed in this country? A serious endeavor for understanding this issue has not been followed yet.

Generally, the reasons for peace process failure in Afghanistan are understood to be a lack of transparency, lack of pervasiveness, and unfairness. These complications bring the issue into an overall discussion framework rather than address smaller problems that might contribute to solving the larger one.

But there is a commonality in all Afghanistan formal peace processes, or national reconciliation programs established with the goal of returning society to peace, and that is the lack of women's participation. Ignoring all other causes of instability in peace processes in Afghanistan, neglecting women's participation—and that of other vulnerable communities—is considered a remarkable problem. Women have always suffered because of conflict vulnerabilities, and because of the war they have experienced discomfort and violence as a marginalized community for years. They have the right to be involved in processes and events that influence their destiny.

After the establishment of the High Peace Council in 2010, only nine Afghanistan women became members of the High Peace Council. They were involved in running the peace process, but overall serious uncertainties are faced when we ask whether women's participation and presence in this process have been pervasive, transparent, effective, and successful? (Hussaini, 1391)

The presence of women in peace processes has been always escorted by hesitations and difficulties because women's participation means restrictions on the peace process; based on armed anti-government forces' ideology, women's participation is not acceptable. Notably, women experienced restrictions and suffering during the Taliban regime.

The participating parties in Afghanistan's peace processes do not have a unified point of view on women's participation. The participation of women in peace processes (politically and socially) has often been an issue of conflict, with different perspectives from the beginning. This example is very general and not directly able to explain the different views towards women's participation in the peace process.

These contrasting and conflicting viewpoints led our investigation to raise many questions. How much will women's voices be reflected in the next steps of the peace process negotiations in Afghanistan? What expectations are reasonable? Do current councils consider women's needs during the peace process? Are nine members out of a total of 69 High Peace Council members able to represent Afghanistan women? Has there been any change in the armed anti-government forces' perspectives on and treatments of women's political and social participation? How much preparedness and reception do they bring to negotiations with women? How well are women able to convince the Taliban in direct peace talks to accept social changes alongside preserving new outcomes on rights and benefits? How much of the Afghanistan peace process is determined by the gender of its participants? How well are women's views reflected in this process? Despite all of these complications and ambiguities in the process, this research intends to review and examine women's participation in peace processes.

Research questions

The main goal of this research is to examine the presence and participation of women in formal and informal peace processes. This question will be accompanied by some detailed sub-questions, which offer more in-depth information:

- A: How can we assess women's participation in this process both qualitatively and quantitatively?
- B: What are the roles and responsibilities of women in this process?
- C: What are the demands and requests of women in this process?
- D: Are there any mechanisms to meet women's demands in this process?
- E: What are the challenges and difficulties of women's participation in this process?

Research methodology

The current document is a practical research methodology that was developed based on qualitative methods. Data collection was made through secondary document studies, detailed key source interviews, and focus group discussions. This research was developed regardless of the limited facilities and security concerns in the four case study provinces, namely Kabul, Balkh, Nangarhar, and Badakhshan.

Random selection of resources in this research was based on objectives and quality consistency; the methodology used was more purpose-wise and avoided probabilities. Key sources were selected based on their relevant knowledge of the issues.

The group of people interviewed in this research contains members of the High Peace Council, female members of provincial High Peace Councils, female participants in the Oslo peace talks, university professors, and civil society activists who are involved in peace processes. All approached the issues from different angles. In total, 49 interviews and four focus group discussions were conducted in the provinces of Kabul, Nangarhar, Badakhshan, and Mazar-e Sharif.

Different questionnaires were provided for different interviewees based on their activities in order to get as accurate data as possible. In total five types of questionnaires were developed: a detailed questionnaire for members of the High Peace Council; a detailed questionnaire for male and female members of provincial high peace councils; a detailed questionnaire for civil society activists; a detailed questionnaire for female participants of the Oslo peace talks; and questionnaire for focus group discussions.

In each of the provinces, a spectrum of different entities involved in focus group discussions—provincial peace councils, women's affairs departments, civil society organizations, university professors, and university students (all of which focused on peace issues)—were invited to group discussions. The interviews after classification were put in this research as the basis of research analysis.

Purpose of the research

The main purpose of the research is simply to establish the state of women's participation in the peace processes of Afghanistan. The research also aims to establish the effectiveness, expectations, demands, and role of women in processes, and to ensure women's voices are heard and that their role, demands, and expectations are supported with respect to the peace process.

Importance of the research

Without a doubt, one of the most sustainable markers of peace is the participation of all social and political groups; this in turn emphasizes the pervasiveness of sustainable peace. Peace cannot be gained without considering the benefits of different communities and social groups, and such a peace were gained it would be a brittle peace; in the end, this type of peace causes social prejudice and gaps that lead the peace process towards failure. Therefore, a pervasive peace requires women's participation.

Thus, one of the justifications for women's participation is that they are one of the groups most affected by conflict; it is a group with vulnerabilities that are an important

and mandatory subject. By studying the relationship between peace and gender in this research, we will be able to understand and approach a viewpoint that facilitates the maximum participation of women in the peace process. Their voices will be heard, and programs will be developed to meet their demands and expectations, as well as to understand and implement their ideas about peace building.

Structure and organization of the research

The current research has been written and arranged into four chapters. The first chapter consists of an overall review of the research that includes explanations, methodology, objectives, and key questions. The second chapter is about the relationship between peace and gender. In this chapter the gender perspective is defined and the epistemological basics explained; later on, the subject is divided into three focused discussions: the necessity of women's participation, demands and expectations, and a review of defined probable roles for women in peace processes. In the third chapter, the status of women's participation in peace processes will be discussed and reviewed officially and unofficially. In the fourth chapter, challenges and barriers to women's participation are reviewed. The beginning of this chapter discusses the outlook and perspective of the High Peace Council based on research and interviews. A second article will study and review serious future challenges and barriers to women's participation.

Chapter two; Peace and Gender Perspective

A Gender Perspective

Currently, the uniting issue among all attempts towards peace in Afghanistan is the absence of women in peace talks, though after the establishment of the High Peace Council, women's presence itself became a discussion in the peace process. After the approval of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000, global attention seriously turned to women's participation in peace talks. In this resolution the most important point—which has been emphasized many times—is to heed a gender perspective in peace processes.

As principles of peace, equity and pervasiveness are the two bridge traits of a gender perspective in peace processes. This means that we can only say that peace is based on equity and pervasiveness when women's demands and perspectives are covered, and pervasiveness and equity depend on women's participation. Resolution 1325, the Resolution 1325 National Action Plan, the Constitution of Afghanistan, the National Strategic Development Plan, and other international documents describe this issue. These are very important documents in which the conclusion of a gender perspective is supported, and they give applicable practical mechanisms for achieving that participation.

Before reviewing women's participation in peace processes, we need to explain more about the 'concept of "peace" and gender perspectives, because these terms play a key role in literature surrounding peace and women.

Peace:

Peace as social contract can be defined as follows: Peace is the harmony between the desires of people, groups, and government. In this sense peace is based on the processes that balance power between different social groups, their expectations, and cooperation models, and when the balance is not maintained between power and expectations, a social gap that can result in war and conflict will develop. (Porter, 2007)

The most important principle in defining peace as social protection is that peace is not a 'lack of conflict'; rather it is an agreement between individuals, groups, and government. They discuss their expectations from peace, the circumstances of agreements, and what actions they can take to reach a stable peace. These actions entail efforts to reach a result acceptable by all social groups in which somehow the benefits of everyone are guaranteed.

A "peace agreement" that is acceptable for all and that can reflect the interests of all social groups will result in a stable peace. If the balance between parties' demands and expectations is not considered, different social groups will return to quarrel and conflict.

In general there are three key principles in relation to the definition of peace as a social agreement. First, peace is an active and dynamic process in which the balance is maintained between the expectations and interests of concerned groups. Second, peace is a process based on an agreement in which the interests of all groups are considered and that is acceptable to them. Third, peace is a process that, if the expectation of a group is not met, can result in a gap that creates confrontation and war.

Peace can be divided into two types: positive peace and negative peace. Rummel defines positive and negative peace as follows:

Negative peace: a peace in which rest and order are sacrificed to maintain the demands and expectations of one group over those of the others. Specific versions of this type are exploitation peace, repression, and despotism.

Positive peace: a peace in which order is obtained with the satisfaction of all groups involved and which results in justice and satisfaction for all groups involved. This peace doesn't only signify a lack of violation and conflict; rather it equates to mental rest and real satisfaction for everyone, in addition to a lack of violence.

In contrast to negative peace, positive peace is a social agreement resulting in balance between expectation of all concerned groups, where nobody is expected to sacrifice his interest for the interest of others. All concerned groups can create a context in which the conflicting points can result in compromises and agreements. Positive peace is based on rights and justice.

Gender Perspective

Despite the widespread usage of the term "gender perspective," we still lack a precise definition of it. Understanding what a "gender perspective" is requires that roots and epistemological, anthropological, and theoretical assumptions be closely examined. Without determining a root knowledge of gender perspective, any definition will be simple and imprecise. For a better understanding, first and foremost, the difference between gender and sex should be identified.

"In general sociologists use the sex terminology in classification of skeleton and physiologic differences, which describe men's and women's bodies. In contrast the term gender refers to psychological, social and cultural differences of males and females. Gender is about thoughts and understanding of manhood and womanhood

which socially exist.” (Gedens, 1386)

Presumption of a gender perspective differs between men and women. The differences that give distinct identities to men and women should not lead towards inequality or serve as an excuse for justifying inequality between men and women. Based on this presumption, male and female essences and natures will be reflected when both are free; ascendancy and suffering should not be used. Therefore feminine language and minds work differently than masculine language and minds. This difference is not sufficient by itself. This difference is followed with equality in an environment so that each follows their relations and lives based on mutual understanding and expectations.

Citizenship and the public extent are the extent of equity and equality. This means that men and women should be treated equally and equitably in general. In fact, emphasizing equity without considering the differences between men and women makes no sense, because if the differences between men and women are considered, the equity perception will be meaningless. In other words, if there is no difference, then everybody is equal. Thus, often emphasizing equity is the same as equity and equality. Equity finds meaning when there is difference. Therefore men and women are different, but they are in equal positions.

Understanding and perceiving men and women as coming from a similar phenomenon is not equivalent. The aspects that affect the knowledge and understanding of human beings are relations, expectations, outlook, and presence. These matters have roots in the existence of human beings. Since women experience things differently, their interests, outlook, and expectations are different as well. In principle, understanding and recognizing are identified phenomena, and without these elements recognition and growth are not possible. This means the knowledge of a person is identified based on human expectations.

A gender perspective based on the above dissection means that it should be assumed that men and women do not have the same expectations and background knowledge. If there were similar perspectives exposed by men, it would have meant that knowledge and relations of women would have been a part of the knowledge and relations of men, although knowledge and relations of men and women are different from each other.

Now we can introduce the discussion of a gender perspective in the peace process. Definitions of peace, expectations of peace, and approaches to peace are different. The definition of peace presented by men would not likely be the same as the definition of peace presented by women. The way forward and strategy of men’s

approaches to peace may not be acceptable by women. That is why the issue of a gender perspective will be raised. It means the definition presented for peace will establish pre-conditions and interaction red flags, and that when an agreement takes place it should not be one-dimensional or unilateral.

A gender perspective monitors the balance and equilibrium of peace. It means that when an approach is set for peace, the pre-conditions established for that peace should reflect both men and women. This assumes that men and women from top to bottom should equally involve themselves in peacebuilding and the implementation of peace programs. It also assumes that equal involvement should be organized such that both men and women have the freedom to express important related matters for approaching peace such that men do not impose their peace talks on women, who are present to simply confirm.

Therefore, we can say that peace based on a gender perspective would be a comprehensive, righteous, equal, and to some extent balanced peace. Otherwise, the result would be a masculine peace, which would eliminate, neglect, and/or otherwise subjugate women. The result in turn would be prejudice and violence against women, which would create invalid conflict channels and discourtesy.

Based on the above discussions, peace from a gender perspective could be reviewed in three dimensions: 1) The necessity of women’s participation, 2) women’s demands from and expectations of the peace process, 3) women roles in the peace process. This means that for a gender perspective peace approach, women’s participation should be understood, and afterwards demands and expectations should be listened and responded to. This aims would be impossible to achieve without women’s involvement. The active participation and involvement of women in peace processes is an important mechanism for building peace and meeting women’s expectations throughout the process. Thus, research on the aforementioned subjects will be reviewed in the following three articles.

Article one: The need for women’s participation in the peace process

At the international level the need for women’s participation in peace processes and negotiations is an accepted matter, and practitioners and theoretical social science researchers focused on this issue. There are three main reasons that justify women’s participation in peace processes:

First: “As [women] are affected by conflicts, they similarly will be affected by peace processes” (Porter, 2007). After conflicts end, violence mostly continues

against women. In addition, many women become widows and heads of household with limited or no income.

Second: “Women’s participation in peace processes to ensure social justice is a need” (Porter, 2007). In other words, women’s participation in peace processes can facilitate and orient communities based on the rules of equality and justice. The pervasive peace in which all groups of the community are involved would have more chances at success than a built peace among elites.

Third: From a realistic point of view, women focus more on subjects such as education, health, childcare, social protection, and security. As Enderlin, Stansky, and Porter believe, women focus more on quality of life and security issues than men do; they have an exceptional understanding of the family and community needs. Good understanding and better responses to these needs would increase social protection. (Porter, 2007)

Another argument for women’s participation is the aspect of inclusiveness that is important for the legitimacy and substance of a peace process

If women are excluded from participation in peace processes, the social gap will not be repaired, which will lead the community towards potentially active violence and conflict. This is a particular issue in Afghanistan, where tribal tradition and patriarchy are very important due to significant limitations on women; their lack of inclusion in larger decision-making would affect the balance of society negatively. In such a social and political environment, women’s participation in discussions about a better future for women is paramount. Afghanistan women have been affected for three decades by war in the country; in peace agreements women should play key roles to underscore that justice and equal rights are undeniable needs. The commitment of constitutional law remains the same, and as we have mentioned, women have significant power to meet the real needs of their communities because they are key players in building stable communities. (Hussaini, 1391)

But there are different theories on the integration of women into peace processes. One argues that there is no need for women’s participation, implying that peace and conflict are masculine subjects with no space for women. This belief is primarily justified by government opposition forces, including the Taliban and other armed groups. (Hussaini, 1391) Because conflict and peace are seen as male subjects, some believe that women should not be involved with them. There are also some other people who similarly believe women’s participation is not necessary, but their reason is that the “current peace process is a sick and ill-fated process which will not give results and...[participation] would be a waste of the social rights and

citizenship of women.” (Rohani, 2015)

This argument is based on the assumption that female voices will not be listened to or convincing in peace negotiations. In other words, there is no guarantee for women that they will gain rights through participation in peace processes, and currently women have no means to defend their rights. If women participated in the peace process and their rights were revoked, the revocation would be legitimate because they were involved in the peace negotiations. “Therefore, as this process is ill-fated and sick, the people who are involved in this process—and the Taliban—are not accepting, so women’s rights will not be an issue or red light for them. Therefore, women’s participation is unnecessary.” (Rohani, 2015) But contrary to this theory, women’s participation is vital to the peace process. In other words, a peace process without women’s participation is incomplete and incorrect. When fostering participation in peace processes, we cannot neglect women’s involvement.

There are other reasons that support women’s participation in peace processes and some of the more important ones are outlined below:

- **Pervasive peacebuilding:** The reality is that men and women understand peace objectives—such as expectations, needs, and background areas—differently, and they present different motivations at negotiation tables. A person’s participation in official peace negotiations reflects his or her perspectives on gender difference, roles in peace processes, and involvement in peace discussions. Peace talks have future outcomes such as the establishment of peacebuilding and the reconstruction of economy and social infrastructure. Women’s participation in these negotiations from a gender equity perspective will have a key role in establishing equity and unprejudiced communities after conflict.
- **Participation is women’s right:** Women and men have equal rights and responsibilities. This subject is explained in Article 22 of Afghanistan’s Constitution: “Any type of prejudice and privilege among Afghanistan citizens is not allowed. Both male and female Afghanistan citizens have the same responsibilities and rights as stated in the law.” As men have the right to participate in processes and events that impact them, women should have these rights as well. Peace is one of most serious and important phenomena or events that has great impact on peoples’ lives; it is vital. As the lives of men are affected by conflict and war, the lives of women are more affected. Some people even claim that women have been victims of armed conflicts more than men. War and armed conflicts directly and indirectly affect women through

uncertainties and violence, and it is often impossible for women to cope with these issues. Therefore, women have the right to intervene in peace processes, and to define them based on their own expectations and needs.

- **Resolution 1325 should be implemented:** Resolution 1325 is an important international UN document that stipulates that women's rights will be supported and justified. This document, based on seventh chapter of United Nations' charter, has the prestige of an international law document, and signatory countries are obligated to implement it. Participation, protection, prevention, and resilience are the four pillars of this document. This document emphasizes increasing women's participation in all decision-making levels related to peace and security and ending the armed conflicts caused by gender violence. This resolution aims to increase the roles of women in leading and managing conflicts and enable them to set some applicable measures for reducing gender violence. Afghanistan is a member country of the United Nations and has to implement the resolution in the country. When Afghanistan implements these measures, women's participation will automatically be increased in peace processes and security.
- **Implementation of an Action Plan for women:** Every UN-member country should provide sufficient facilities and arrange for the implementation of Resolution 1325. In order to achieve the set goals of this document, Afghanistan has provided tools and paperwork for implementation. The main objectives of the Action Plan are: 1) To take appropriate actions to protect women from effects of conflict such as gender violence and IDP issues; 2) to ensure women equal participation in decision-making structures and entities related to peace and security; 3) to determine and support gender equity in peace processes and security; 4) to support women's innovation and organizations in peace processes and mediation; 5) to highlight women's participation in peace agreements and implementation; 6) to consider appropriate action points about gender in peace agreements; 7) to end the impunity for crimes of sexual violence; 8) to teach boys and girls coping strategies for sexual violence; 9) to support and increase the capacity of civil society organizations (and specifically organizations that work for women) to engage with Resolution. 1325 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Afghanistan, 1393) This plan was drafted in 2015 and approved by the country's president, and one of the entities involved was the High Peace Council. This council is the main implementer of the plan to increase women's participation in peace processes. (Afghanistan, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2015)

- **Women's participation requires a just peace (and a just peace needs women's participation):** Afghanistan's peace program has three conditions: It should be just, pervasive, and sustainable. (Qasimyar, 2015) Peace without women's participation will never be sustainable, pervasive, or righteous. A just and pervasive peace is characterized by women being involved in all levels of peace programs. Women make up half of population, and they are more vulnerable in conflicts than men. Therefore, it is women's right to be involved, participate in events that affect them, and make decisions. Thus, the peace in which half of the population has been ignored is not a righteous peace, which means that women should be involved in the peace process. (Qasimyar, 2015) In addition to these requirements for a sustainable peace, we need long-term strategies to eliminate structural causes of conflicts and violence—strategies that will lead us towards justice, equality, facility, and cooperation. Although politicians and key players play vital roles in peace processes, efforts by government bodies and officials would not have much impact if citizens in the community—and especially women—were not involved in peace processes. (Hazratpor, 1390)

For the aforementioned reasons, women's participation in peace processes and the consideration of a gender perspective are vital and necessary. In the absence of a gender perspective, peace processes would not be righteous, pervasive, effective, or complete. Therefore, the theory that women's participation is unnecessary because peace processes ignore a gender perspective is masculine-based and counter to peace and development. It means that issues that are important for them (this is an assumption that women would speak in favor of women. There is maybe the tendency, but we have seen in Afghanistan that female Parliamentarians, for example, represent very different perspectives of women's rights and empowerment (see family law). Considering a gender-based perspective and approach not only meets women's interests, but it would also be to the benefit of society. Later, the aspect of representation will become important—how can women and/or men in the peace process be (formally) assigned to represent women's interests? As it is discussed later, a gender perspective should be formally implemented in an agenda setting, negotiations, and the drafting of a peace agreement. Further, the government should establish a gender—or inclusiveness—committee that consists of men and women who have the knowledge, contacts, and position to influence the decision-making process.

Article two: Women's demands from the peace process

As we have said, peace based on a gender perspective requires attention to women's demands. These demands should be raised by women, and women should be involved and play key roles in the implementation of the resulting measures. This is not possible unless women are involved in the process. Thus, this article focuses on women's demands from the peace process.

We cannot consider women's demands from a group standpoint. Women have different positions and statuses in their communities, and as a result they have different expectations and demands from Afghanistan's peace process. The first group is made up of women who are solicitous about their futures, children, security, and families. Most of their expectations are related to access to education, security so that their children can be safe, and establishing a routine quality of life. This group does not care about participation in the peace process and is not willing to be present at peace talks. The second group is comprised of women who are involved in civil and social activities. They want their citizenship rights to be in place and explicit in constitutional, human rights, and other documents such as international conventions, feeling strongly, too, that their given rights should not be overridden. The third group is comprised of women who are willing to participate in the peace process without concerns about security or rights they might have. These women aim to be efficient and to work as peace builders or change bringers. Therefore, they are not concerned with their citizenship rights. (Kamavi, 2015) Based on this classification, we can delineate all of women's expectations and demands from the peace process as follows:

- **Justice:** One of women's primary demands is justice. Transitional justice should be implemented so that people who have committed war crimes and violated citizens' human rights see trial. During the last three decades, women's human rights have been overridden (Afghanistan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1393), and women have lost their basic citizenship rights. Women have been marginalized when it comes to decision-making opportunities and have not played any role in political and social life. Women also face the most serious violence, particularly sexual violence.

A lack of access to juridical entities and the generally lax punishment of criminals have imposed suffering on women. Women do not play a key role and are marginalized. (Afghanistan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1393) They have been unable to advocate for the implementation of justice or effective

decision making, and as a result, victims and vulnerable women are waiting for justice. Peace without transitional justice will not be accepted or valuable for women; during armed conflicts human rights will be overridden, leaving primarily women and children vulnerable. In most cases, rape and sexual violence are war tactics and reviewing them in this research is out of writing capacity. Coping with these wounds and injuries requires the implementation of justice, and this is the most important request of Afghanistan women from the peace process. (Hamdard, 2015)

A peace based on injustice and the reversal of human rights would have less of a chance of stability and sustainability. It could transform into violence and conflict very easily.

- **Securing women's rights and achievements in peace negotiations:** Which peace program can focus on women's rights? Women want to know the status of their rights and their achievements. Do we have any guarantee to protect them? Are women's rights and citizenship rights stop lights for peace negotiations? Are peace builders pushing back women's rights? The status of women's rights and citizenship should be defined and transparent. Women are keen to know that their rights will be protected and will not be compromised.
- **Transparent and pervasive peace programs:** Women primarily want to be involved in peace programs and practically take on roles; they do not want speeches and participation on paper. Additionally, peace programs, especially negotiations, should be transparent. (Qasimyar, 2015) Limitations to women's freedom should not be created and women should have the right to choose. (Saqeb, 2015) This means that women, just as men, will be empowered as decision makers in their daily lives and that all of their rights will be indicated in Afghanistan's constitutional law. Outcomes of last decade, resolutions, and international conventions should remain in effect. (Rohani, 2015)

Article three: Definable roles for women in the peace process

It is critical to consider a gender perspective in the peace process. It is possible that focusing solely on women's participation may not result in designing a gender perspective in the peace process, because the presence of women in the peace process doesn't mean their demands and needs are considered; indeed, sometimes

men who support a gender perspective can be effective in this regards. But there is no doubt that the participation of women who are committed to proposing gender perspectives in the peace process is vital.

One of the methods by which we can review participation from a gender perspective is to review the roles and position of women in peace processes. That means asking what roles women play in the peace process. For reviewing women roles in the peace process, first we will review the model for women's participation at the international level, and afterwards we will focus on the roles that women will be able to play in the peace process. The roles women play in the peace process so far are as follows:

1. As mediator or mediation team member: One phase of peace building is mediation, which leads the peace process into negotiation and mutual talks. Naturally, the mediation team or mediator should be impartial in order to gain the trust of both parties and succeed in this phase. Experience shows that women have been successful as mediators in peace building processes. There were even women, such as Betty Bogombe from Uganda, who served as successful mediators in peace building for more than one party. (Diaz, 2010)
2. Representative of the mediation team: Mediation teams are not only discussing vital issues; they also set agendas, specify structures of talks, facilitate negotiations, and nominate participants. Experience from talks in countries where conflict has recently taken place shows that women have been less involved in this mediation phase, but that their participation is not inefficient. Women have been able to reflect feedbacks on demands, women's interests, issues, and concerns during this mediation phase.
3. As signatories: A signatory is an individual who can sign on behalf of another party on any type of agreement or document featuring a third party's representatives. Experience shows that women at the international level have signed peace building or reconciliation documents; Amena Afzali and Seema Wali, from Afghanistan, both signed the Bonn Agreement in 2001.
4. As witnesses: Peace negotiations are usually officially witnessed by people or groups of people. In most cases, these people sign agreements on behalf of facilitating or supporting countries.
5. As monitors on behalf of women's civil societies: Monitoring negotiations is another role of women in conflict-affected or conflict-ended countries have played during peacebuilding and negotiations. Female monitors of the

peace process enable negotiators to be aware of how much women's equity, concerns, and expectations are guaranteed in negotiation talks and, in turn, of hypothetical outcomes.

6. Establishment of parallel movements: Parallel movements or gatherings that groups of women, mostly unofficially, attempt to ensure parties accepted their demands, requests, recommendations, and expectations through movements, civil society events, conferences, protests, and campaigns.
7. As advisors for gender-related issues to mediators, facilitators, and representatives: One of the effective strategies for ensuring participation is to consider gender-sensitive terms and texts in agreements, which comes with the participation of women as advisors in gender-related activities.
8. As a technical committee or gender working group member: Participation in technical committees is an important opportunity for women in the peacebuilding process. This opportunity makes women able to easily raise their needs, recommendations, concerns, and expectations on peace negotiation tables. (Diaz, 2010)

Implementation of the aforementioned roles depends on the status and conditions of every community, whereas women's capacities, what parties think about women's participation, and how much international organizations support women's participation all affect peace process progress. But as for women's participation in the peacebuilding process and different roles, there is no doubt. Now we can review definitions of Afghanistan women's roles in the peace process.

Definable roles for Afghanistan women in the peace process:

Different roles and opportunities for women in peace programs with anti-government forces can be formally defined. Some are outlined below:

Women can be involved in the provision of peace talk strategy, mechanism, structure, and framework. Women can play roles in the provision of peace strategy, and the can draft mechanisms and frameworks for the benefit of citizens, especially women. (Saqeb, 2015)

- ✓ Women can be involved in setting the agendas, standards, and red lines for peace talks and ceasefire/peace agreements. Defining pre-conditions and red lines of peace talks without women cannot

result in righteous and pervasive peace talks. (Rohani, 2015)

- ✓ Women are able to participate in peace talks as members of the mediation team. At this stage, women can prevent a bad agreement and support women's demands so that their requests can be reflected in peace agreements. (Saqeb, 2015) Mediation is the center of the peace process; in fact most of the peace dimensions and faces are covered. In negotiations agreements take place, decisions are made, resolutions or agreements can be issued, and mechanisms and next stages of the peace process are discussed and agreed to.
- ✓ Women are mostly ignored in peace negotiations because most people assume that women do not play roles in conflict and or have ownership over peace—that peace occurs among people who are involved in conflict and war. Or people assume that women do not have the capability to negotiate. Thus, negotiations have generally not been based on a gender perspective, and the main concerns of women have not been brought to the negotiation table. In all informal meetings between negotiators with the Taliban (except one or two), women were absent. But we must accept that women's participation in peace negotiations is not only to the benefit of women, but it benefits communities as well.
- ✓ Women can play monitoring roles in peace negotiations. The presence of women in peace negotiations to some extent supports the prevention of prejudiced and unjust decisions. Women in this role will be able to prevent signing "bad agreements," reveal prejudiced decisions, and attract the attention of civil societies, human rights organizations, and community people. But this they can only accomplish effectively if there is a mechanism in place to respond to monitors' suggestions and critiques.
- ✓ Women can focus on long-term awareness raising. Women play a key role in the socialization of children, one of the most important

processes of human life. Personality, thinking, habits, values, and beliefs are shaped through the socialization process. While women are educating the future generation of a community, they can educate, more than any other, a generation of peace defenders. Education is one of the most important peacebuilding tools. As the first educators of communities, women have an important role and position in peacebuilding.

- ✓ Although the results and outcomes of education are not necessarily visible, in a long-term peace process they can bring fundamental and vital changes for a peaceful life in individual communities. Because women are able to establish peaceful minds, they should set up social communications and empower each to better understand the community's security status and find solutions for issues through internal and external group talks that promote the idea of a peaceful-living environment. Awareness raising about peace is one of a community's vital needs because change starts with awareness and conflicts can also occur intentionally. This means that conflict at first exists in the mind and awareness of fighters; after that it takes on a physical and external form.
- ✓ Women can establish supportive peace movements. Social movements are intentional attempts to change uncertain situations into desirable situations. A common social awareness movement is based on unique specifications and at least one group understanding the benefits of the movement. Women's outcomes are results of social women's movements. Women from all over the world attempt to cope with conflicts and bring peace through social movements. Women against conflicts play a big role here; thus we can say that "peace is a woman's subject."

Chapter Three; Women's Participation in the Peace Process

In chapter two we reviewed the three dimensions of peace based on a gender perspective related to women's participation in the peace process. In chapter two, sufficient efforts were made to define and show the importance of the philosophy behind women's participation in peace processes.

Building on chapter two, this chapter will attempt to define and review women's participation in the peace process in Afghanistan and identify the relevant challenges and opportunities.

Methods of women's participation in the Afghanistan's peacebuilding process

A look at the High Peace Council

The High Peace Council as a responsible institution for the peace process was established in 2010 after the National Peace Advisory Jerga, in which over 1600 people participated. The recommendations that came out of the advisory jerga were approved in the Traditional Loya Jerga (Declaration of Traditional Loya Jerga, 1390) in spite of various peacebuilding recommendations in this declaration. In the declaration of the Advisory Loya Jerga for Peace, one item of article 8 emphasized the protection of women's rights:

“The people of Afghanistan want a justly peace, in which the right of all the citizens including women and children is considered, and for the provision of social justice the Jerga emphasizes equal application of the law on all the citizens of the country.”

However, in the loya jerga, adequate opportunity was not provided for women's issues and peace.

Article 8 describes the normative inclusion of women, whereas this quote provides an impression about the process:

In order to review and study the participation of women in the peace process, it seems important to understand the position and role of women in terms of the composition and structure of the High Peace Council, and therefore we will first start with the composition and structure of the High Peace Council, with efforts to identify the position of women in this structure and composition.

Structure and composition of the High Peace Council

Although the High Peace Council is still young (newly established), it involves a wide organization and broad bureaucratic administration. The High Peace Council consists of its president (directorate), secretariat, executive bodies, a spokesperson, three assistant vice presidents, advisors, and committees on communication, public awareness raising, provincial affairs, invitations and contacts, detainee affairs, grievance resolution, finance, and administration. This council is consists of 69 members, of whom nine are women. In other words, women make up 12% of the High Peace Council members. The council has sub-committees and organizational units illustrated as following:

I would suggest to provide some more information about HPC and APRP in order to be more precise. I will attach an official presentation of Women in HPC.

It is also important to mention, that APRP has a gender strategy!!!

Women's position in the High Peace Council

The position of women in the council is defined under in the gender section. The gender section falls under the purview of the secretariat of High Peace Council, which works based on the constitutional declaration of the United Nations Security Council (Resolution 1325). It is also related to other international conventions that pertain to gender equality in Afghanistan in line with the country's National Development Strategy.

The exclusive focus of the gender section is on increased education and awareness raising for women, particularly with respect to women's rights and responsibilities in the peace process, and on the importance of women's participation in the national peace process. This section functions under the supervision of the Women's Affairs Technical Committee, which has the following aims:

1. the establishment of central and local organizational structures in which gender equity is considered;
2. the inclusion of topics related to gender equity in all activities of the peace program, national peacebuilding activities, and the return to peaceful life;
3. the establishment of a quality and effective monitoring system to consistently direct gender issues at the structural and executive levels. (High Peace Council, 2013)

With the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP) gender team and the HPC women's committee, we tried to structure and communicate three layers

of gender balance and women's participation:

Promoting the meaningful participation of women in the APRP and the peace process

The APRP's fundamental policy is to promote peace through an inclusive political approach with the active participation of women as peace advocates, decision makers, and beneficiaries. The APRP Gender Policy provides the conceptual framework for the engagement of women in the peace process and outlines three goals of gender inclusiveness:

1. Gender-responsive institutional structures at the national and sub-national level of APRP/HPC. We aim to have more female provincial peace council (PPC) members and provincial joint secretariat team (PJST) members and to improve their working conditions regarding security and social protection.
2. Gender-responsive implementation of the APRP stages (social outreach/confidence building/ negotiation, demobilization, and consolidation of peace)
3. Active and meaningful formal and informal roles for women in the peace process

Provincial peace committees

Provincial peace committees are actually provincial branches of the High Peace Council that are managed and led by the governor of each province. Afghanistan women are also represented in the constitution and structure of the provincial peace committees such that the total number of women represented in all of Afghanistan's is 71 individuals. (Frough, 2015)

Women's role in the peace process:

As stated, gender inclusion in the peace process is realized through the participation of women in the peace process, because "women's worries and concerns can only be reflected by women themselves." (Kamawi 2015) In this regard, the key question in relation to the participation of women is what roles and responsibilities they have in this institution. And what role and responsibilities do they have in Afghanistan's peace process?

In order to review the role of women in the peace process, the difference between their formal and informal roles should be established. Afghanistan women have participated both in formal and informal ways in pushing ahead in peace programs. Numerous Civil Society Organizations exist that have programs related to women, peace and security and some of them are technically working in relation to these subjects.

Article one: Women's participation in Afghanistan's formal peace processes

Formal processes are considered activities that are carried out by the government or government institutions. The outcomes and decisions taken under these activities are obligatory and lead to agreements on ceasefire and the solution of conflict. This process includes preventive measures to avoid clash, peace protection operations, the institutionalization of peacebuilding, disarmament, and the reconstruction of structures. This process considers more political, military dimensions of peace and conflict in which political and military leaders, the UN, regional organizations and government, and nongovernmental humanitarian organizations are involved and play a vital role.

The purpose of this paper on the formal role of women in the peace process is to establish the duties and responsibilities of the female members of the High Peace Council. In other words, the purpose is to identify what positions are covered by women and what responsibilities they have undertaken. To the extent the evidence shows, and according to what female peace council members have stated in their speeches, the highest position available to women is as advisor to the executive committee of the High Peace Council. All female members of the HPC participate in the HPC general assembly. One woman is working as the advisor, and the rest are working as part of the secretariat, as assistant secretaries of committees and different sections of the High Peace Council. These are the organizational duties that women are undertaking; we will later refer to the roles and responsibilities they are taking in pushing peace programs forward.

Additionally it has been stated that gender plays an important role in coordinating the reception, integration, and direction of armed opposition groups during the rehabilitation and reconstruction rural areas. In the consolidation of peace, women consider the rights and role of gender in the peace process, and active participation can address their own needs as well as the needs of society.

But what mechanism does active participation use, and what needs does it serve? These statements that are meant to address the role of women use generalities that obscure the role of women in the peace process.

In addition, it is stated that "the High Peace Council will continue to its commitment of promoting role of women as supporters and mediators in the peace process at national and international levels." (High Peace Council, 1392) In this report, women are referred to as active followers and intermediaries.

Per the explanation provided in the gender section, the High Peace Council has counted the following as objectives:

the establishment of central and local organizational structures in which gender equity is considered and followed;

1. the inclusion of topics related to gender equity in all activities in the peace program, national peacebuilding strategy, and the return to peaceful life;
2. the establishment of a quality and effective monitoring system to consistently direct gender issues at the structural and executive levels. (High Peace Council, 1392)

These objectives indicate that women have roles in central and local organizational structures in which gender equity is considered. Mechanisms for this include the development of topics related to gender equality. Recommendations represent the benefits, point of views, and suggestions and recommendations of women in all the activities of the peace process and also in the establishment of an effective monitoring system.

In consideration of descriptions above, and to arrive at an explanation and better assessment of the role of women in peace programs, the formal duties and responsibilities of women can be reviewed and analyzed in three levels:

- **At the international level**

Participation in meetings and conferences: The members of High Peace Council have participated in different peace conferences and numerous formal and informal meetings held in different countries. At the international level women have participated in conferences in Paris and Qatar, and they had an informal and direct discussion with the Taliban in Norway. One of the most important trips female members of the peace council took was to the Philippines in order to share experiences and learn peacebuilding methods from the peacebuilding activists of that country. Apart from this, one of the most important achievements of women at this level was the informal discussion with the Taliban in Norway, in which a number of women (from parliament, the High Peace Council, and civil society) participated. This was the first time that women directly spoke to the Taliban, which will be further explained later.

- **At the national level**

Organization of meetings and networks for supporting peace: At the national level, women—except for their daily activities in the High Peace Council—take part in organizing different meetings with civil society organizations and providing peace-related support to institutions and active organizations. One of their most important achievements is the collection of 25,000 women’s signatures from all over Afghanistan in support of peace. Therefore, the female members of the council and its secretariat can be said to engage in active participation and close collaboration in the peace process through engagement with different internal, regional, and international institutions and civil society, human rights groups, women’s networks, the Women Research Institute, Equity peace and Democracy Organization, UNDP, UNAMA, UN Women, and the EU. (Nooristani 2015)

- **At the local level:**

Awareness raising, discussion, and motivation: The formal role of women at the local level is to oversee the roles and responsibilities of female members of the provincial peace Committees. Provincial peace committees have two to three female members. They talk to and work with civil society activists, school managers, and social and political organizations such as councils and parties in order to rally support for peacebuilding. Talking with families of armed opposition forces and families whose sons are studying in Pakistani madrasas (religious schools) are some other activities women undertake. Ultimately, female members of provincial peace committees are not ineffective, and their importance cannot be denied. (Talaat, 2015) In general PPC do not have enough authority and capacity; the most important activity they carry out is inviting armed opposition groups to the peace process, distributing incentives and aid packages to people who join the peace process, and addressing household conflicts. The most important role of women in the peace process is talking with the families of oppositions.

Women’s achievements in the High Peace Council

- **Attract global support and attention :** Women in the peace process have succeeded in rallying the support of international communities for maintaining peace in Afghanistan to some extent. They have achieved this specifically through their presence and participation in different conferences to share their concerns and claims with different countries and organizations, such as Germany and at the United Nations.

- **Discussion with Taliban:** In the peace process, the women of the High Peace Council, some representatives of parliament, and some social activists succeeded in obtaining an independent and direct discussion with the Taliban. The meeting was organized in Norway, and about eight women from civil society, parliament, and peace council participated. On the Taliban side, no women participated in the meeting. The meeting emphasized exchanging views on women’s rights, and questions included: What is the Taliban’s perspective on women’s rights? Is the peace program successful, and have members of the Taliban integrated into the community and started to live normal lives? What is the future of women’s rights, and specifically what will happen to the achievements of the last decade? The demands of Taliban in this meeting revolved around changes to constitutional law, the freedom of Taliban prisoners, identification of a schedule for withdrawal of international military forces, the prohibition of negative propaganda against the Taliban, and the identification of specific issues for the Taliban. In addition, the Taliban verbally emphasized and agreed to consider women’s rights, though this cannot be seriously counted upon.

Afghanistan participants’ requests emphasized continuing discussion and negotiation, the prevention of civilian casualties, and reduced obstacles to social services such as education. Regarding the change in the constitution and consideration of women’s rights from the Taliban side, representatives stated that “we will provide and respect their rights based on Islamic Sharia law; they have the right to work, education, and heritage.” (Hakim, 2015) The Taliban speech could be summarized as “our demand is the provision and implementation of Islamic Sharia law in Afghanistan.” (Hakim, 2015)

The truth is that this demand from the Taliban is not a new matter; from the beginning they had rallied for the implementation of Sharia law. Even now, in contrast to the suggestion that the Taliban’s views have changed, there are no new demands raised by their side. The Taliban have stated that women would be given rights according to Sharia law; in a radical reading and interpretation, this is a return to the first point. Today women are working in the judicial system, in court or legal institutions, in national police units, in national and international organizations. Furthermore Sharia law is not a solid and constant matter; rather, it is an interpretable reality. Therefore there is no single interpretation of Sharia law; every group understands and translates it

based on their preconceptions, background, and expectations. The Taliban's willingness to discuss women is a positive step and continuing such meetings might be effective in shifting and changing the perspective of the Taliban. Accordingly, this discussion could be counted as an achievement of women in the peacebuilding process. (Samimi 2015)

Raising awareness about peace: Raising awareness is one of women's achievements in supporting peace. It is important not to ignore women from different parts of society, such as school students, heads of ethnic groups, families of armed opposition forces, and so on. While the capability of women to carry out these responsibilities has been doubted, the activity itself is one of the most important and basic actions women can take. This is because some of the awareness raised by women has had real impact. This shows that awareness raising is one of the basic needs of the peacebuilding process in Afghanistan.

- **Representing Afghanistan women:** The women of the High Peace Council—in cooperation with institutions, especially networking institutions—have always been active in trying to meet with women in different areas and listen to their opinions on peace. Over the course of their tenure, they have collected the signatures of 250,000 women in support of peace and ceasefire. This pro-peace, anti-war petition has been sent to the government of Afghanistan and representatives of the United Nations.

This campaign was successful and impressive in collecting women's voices and votes, but the HPC was not able/willing to follow through with concrete actions. There were no financial resources available, and the effort was overshadowed by the presidential elections.

One aspect this research could also highlight is the question about money: the women's committee/gender unit asked, unfortunately without success, for a budget they would be able to allocate and spend on implementing programs. For resources, they depend on the good will of the executive committee.

Article two: Women's participation in Afghanistan's informal peace processes

Informal activities are related to the plans and actions carried out by social institutions under the framework of NGOs, networks, and common citizens. This method entails activities such as demonstrations, inter-group discussion, and empowerment

of citizens in different contexts. In fact, the informal process can include anything in the course peacebuilding that takes place outside of formal structures.

In this research, informal roles reference the roles that women are playing outside the framework of the High Peace Council. The informal roles include activities and plans that women are carrying out in social fields under the framework of organization. Life in a peaceful world free of violence is a real concern for women in Afghanistan. Therefore, they are very keen to establish peace, and women's right activists are in search of peace through the framework of institutions and social movements.

1. These activities can be divided to different sections:
2. Organizing media press conferences or other meetings to support the demands of women in the peace process;
3. Interview and discussion: many women have made efforts to reflect their demands and requests through mass media;
4. Advocacy to support female police: some women have made efforts to empower women working in the police force;
5. Advocacy to increase the number of female police: in relation to increasing the number of women police, efforts have been made to encourage women to pursue this career;
6. Support the women of provincial peace committees: efforts have been made to ensure that PPCs are supported, that their limitations are reviewed, and that various activities have been carried out to empower the women in these groups;
7. Supporting the women in High Peace Council: efforts have also been made to ensure the women in High Peace Council are supported;
8. Issue of prioritizing women's security and reducing violence against women: in some cases women and social institutions have raised their objection in this matter.

Assessing the role of women in the peace process:

The role and position of women in the peace process have not been clearly defined. We are confused regarding the role and position of women in the formal peace process. I think it is important to consider the wider context of the High Peace Council and the peace process: Although the role and positions of male members

are not clear, I would guess it important to mention that the negotiation team (such as that which was organized for the Murree Process) was set up on short notice and was open for changes. As I had understood it, Din Mohammad and Hekmat Karzai were discussing about the inclusion of at least one women in the negotiation team before the announcement of Taliban leader Mullah Omar's death. Here is it also important to consider that women are not an undivided unity; often they are fractured because of competition. Experiences of other countries show that women are more successful if they cooperate. However, the formal participation of women has not been properly considered; the role of women in informal peace processes has been colorful. In this regard, women are active outside of legal and formal political structures in their efforts to prevent and end war and in their support of easing the discomfort of war, stopping violence and conflicts, and encouraging people to support peace. But there are also cases of women pushing their husbands to fight in order to earn money, and many women are of the opinion that peace talks with Taliban are not favorable. Experience has shown that informal mechanisms are the most important opportunities for women to work on maintaining peace and reflecting their wishes in regards to safety, security, and education. But participation in informal processes does not carry the assurance of women's rights, and it cannot ease all their strains. The risk and challenge for women is the potential to lose the opportunity to participate in the formal peace process. In the informal process, a lot of work could be done, and good programs might be implemented; reasonable suggestions and views might be designed. But it is the formal institutions that make the final decisions. It is the formal processes that provide the mechanism, framework, and strategy for conflict resolution through processes such as changing constitutional law and changing the system. The participation of groups in the communities and so on is agreed. Therefore, the most important way to avoid neglecting women's participation in the peace process is solidifying their participation in the formal processes. Being active only in the informal process is not sufficient; it does not guarantee any practical obligation. Therefore, the basic solution involves the movement of women from informal peace processes to formal processes.

In order to achieve a gender-based process, it should be insisted upon that peace activists (women) participate in the formal processes of peace. While women are kept aside from formal peace processes, such as negotiation proceedings, they maintain the eagerness for and compulsion towards peace, and they organize their activities through informal channels. Currently women's regional and pro-regional formations and widespread relations with political parties, groups, and specialized

organization have opened up new horizons and prospects for peace. Being affiliated with parties or strong factions could be advantageous as well as disadvantageous. It provides women with the opportunity to be present in important meetings, but women being present in meetings does not mean that men are listening to them. It also does not automatically mean that women are speaking in favor of other women. Thinking that the participation of women automatically leads to the inclusion of women's interests and concerns on an agenda or peace agreement is an assumption that has to be explored further in the context of Afghanistan.

But it is necessary that the urgent and active precedent of women in informal peace process areas is transferred to formal peace process areas. The necessary coordination and cooperation should be defined between formal and informal activities; uncoordinated, dispersed, and chaotic activities and programs cannot achieve desirable results. Coordination can enforce these networks and will increase the results of activities. These activities utilize the experience, specialization, advice, cognition, relation, and even means of each other. Finally, coordination, support, and mutual learning results in increased trust among entities, and this will raise their demands and expectations from people in higher positions.

The absence of women's concerns in peace processes is directly related to the exclusion of women in peace discussions. The only solution is to promote debate over women's issues and expectations for women in peace agreements, as well as to encourage women's participation and presence in peace negotiations. If women are excluded from this stage, attention to their views and expectations becomes difficult in later stages. Ignoring this would be harmful to peace in terms of gender perspective, sustainability, and creating an impartial community with equal rights.

Chapter four; Challenges and Obstacles to Women's Participation in the Peace Process

In chapter three, we covered descriptive subjects in relation to women's participation in the peace process. In this chapter, efforts are made to review changes that have occurred in relation to women's participation in the peace process. But before that, with an overview of the High Peace Council and in consideration of the position of women in the peace program, we will review challenges to women's participation. Reviewing challenges to women's participation is necessary because our review and identification of these challenges will not have the ability to improve on them. Identification of challenges will help us understand the barriers to realizing peace with a gender perspective and provide practical ways forward for change. Another question that may arise is: Is there a mechanism through which the voice of women in peace negotiations would certainly be heard? These two subjects are reviewed in the two articles in this chapter.

Article one: Perspectives and traits of the High Peace Council

1. The High Peace Council is a government institution that represents the government of Afghanistan. The High Peace Council's members are selected by the government of Afghanistan, while the peace process requires intermediation that is trusted by people on both sides of the conflict. (Rafyee 2015) In addition, what is planned or raised by the government of Afghanistan and the High Peace Council is political peace; social peace is neglected. Political peace doesn't correlate with the sustainability of social peace.
2. The High Peace Council consists of individuals who have war history. At least 53 members are related to the group that is part of the collective and parties that played roles in the civil war of 1980-90. Thirteen members are part of Hezb-e Islami, eight members are part of Jamaat-e-Islami, and four members are part of Harakat-e Islami. Twelve members have previously held responsibilities in the Taliban regime. (Hussaini 1391)
3. In the High Peace Council, individuals with different backgrounds and perspectives are present. Each has a different definition of the opposition armed groups based on which they are willing to have to contact with. Some individuals have war backgrounds with the Taliban, and some have work experience with them. Some feel closeness, and others feel hatred and abhorrence. This brings the impartiality of the council into question as well as complicates the process of reaching agreement. This causes the council to "not reach an agreement and

consequently not reach solid results as well” (Jalil 2015) Taking the Taliban’s side in the High Peace Council has an unpleasant effect on the perspective and trust of citizens and provincial peace committees. Najeeb Paikan, a member of a provincial peace committee, states: “I wish people who lead the High Peace Council did not share the Taliban’s views and perspective; I don’t trust this structure, the procedure we are using to generate integration. When the supervisor of High Peace Council is organizing an exordium and a death ceremony for Mullah Omar, and announcing that he is a good person, the Taliban are a consistent movement.” (Paikan 2015) Another example is Qadria Yazdanparast, a social activist and member of a provincial peace council, who states: “When Prince Shahid, the spokesperson of the High Peace Council, called Mullah Omar a martyr in the Ghaziabad of the Kunar province incident, we 100-150 individuals forming the High Peace Council carried out an objective movement that is recorded in media archives. I presented my resignation letter to the High Peace Council, and at that time stated that we were done with work because by calling Mullah Omar a martyr we had become the fifth pillar.” (Yazdanparast 2015) He trusted that the job of High Peace Council is irrelevant and, at least under the current guidelines, that continuing its work would be a mistake and would not solve any problems.

4. Most members of the High Peace Council have other formal occupations, holding membership in parliament’s lower house, upper house, human rights organizations, and so on. (Forough 2015) In the provinces, as the provincial peace committees work under the supervision of the governor, it has been stated that members of the High Peace Council do not even attend meetings, just receive their salaries at the end of the month. (Qassimyar 2015) It has been stated that High Peace Council members are selected based on political interests and affairs. They have not been selected based on the requirements of the peace process, which means, in a way, it has tried to engage people who have domineering desires engaged somewhere. However, peacebuilding needs technical experience and professional people. Which means peacebuilding, besides being a social and political issue, is a technical and specialized process. (Forough 2015) However, the required capacity of specialized understanding is “absolutely” not seen in the High Peace Council. (Yazdanparast 2015)
5. So far, the peace council does not have a national reconciliation strategy. They do not have a program, aim, or strategy. Even if they exist, they are not obligated to consensus or gathering, and it is not clear how well the council represents the

nation or if it wields political credit that should be supported. How serious are these programs? How many resources do they have? While the peace process is complicated and difficult, it is also not possible without a thorough and deep strategy based on specialization, expertise, and consideration from different angles and perimeters. (Mohammadi 2015) The High Peace Council should organize all its programs based on a codified strategy in which “red lines” are specified and operationalizing mechanisms of strategies are projected. (Rohani 2015) The bafflement and confusion of the High Peace Council in determining its strategy, objectives, program, and conduits for reaching peace can be a huge hole in the peacebuilding process. Peacebuilding needs different and consequent stages. Disposition of peace, maintenance of peace, and institutionalization of peace are the most important steps in peacebuilding, and each needs a separate but linked and coordinated program of action.

6. It seems unlikely that the High Peace Council has considered this issue.
7. Based on the perspective of analysts and researchers, the High Peace Council lacks independence and authority. In fact, most of the issues are decided in another program, and the High Peace Council is not even involved. Based on the perspective of interviewees, the High Peace Council “has a consumption role and is a project [that exists] so that the amount money accumulated for it could be spent.” (Rafiee 2015) Therefore, the High Peace Council is a superficial structure, and in its place “there are individuals, groups, and special units who are practically the decision makers on issues related to discussion with armed oppositions. They preserve all subject matters; others in fact are not involved, do not know anything, and are not actually being advised. Most members of the High Peace Council are not involved in and do not know anything about the subject matter. If they are involved, their points of views are not reflected at all. Even if reflected, their perspectives are not followed. There are individuals or special individuals or a special group who are the practical decision makers.” (Rohani 2015) Even some members of provincial peace committees believe that the High Peace Council was a big opportunity for project building and receiving privileges. (Yazdanparast 2015). In some provinces, members of provincial peace committees severely confront each other and yet have not succeeded in distributing positions and privileges. If they are not able to solve their own disagreements, would they be able to solve bigger conflicts? (Anwari 2015) The High Peace Council does not have a clear definition for armed opposition groups or groups on the other side of talks and debates. To

engage with the Taliban, adequate information from the other side should be available. The opposition groups should be classified and we should liaise with them based on these classifications. However, we need to know their definition of armed groups. Armed opposition groups are made up of different groups and ideologies; at least on an analytical level, they cannot be placed in one single group, and their differences cannot be ignored. Talks require recognition, and based on that recognition and classification, we can determine who to talk to, how, through what channels, and with what preconditions. These classifications would enable the council to agree and decide which groups to meet with. Classifications would also help members understand what preconditions are feasible and with which group negotiations are more comfortable. But this matter is not clear.

8. Provincial peace committees have limited authorities. Their only responsibility is inviting armed opposition groups into the peace process and distributing aid kits to them, and it seems like this method is unlikely to engender positive results; in the long term, this method is counter to the development and maintenance of security. Provincial peace committees do have significant impact in reducing insecurity, and thus some people believe that the “existence and absence of provincial committees are the same.” (Anwari 2015) On other hand, insecurity and the affiliation of people with armed groups are due to poverty, unemployment, corruption, lack of good governance, etc. The High Peace Council and provincial peace committees are not able to provide employment opportunities to people, reduce poverty, and enforce good governance. This is not the responsibility of the peace council and provincial peace committees; rather it is the responsibility and duty of the government.

Article two: Challenges and barriers to women’s participation in the peace process

- **Quantity:**The number of female members of the High Peace Council and provincial peace committees is very small. Of the 69 members of council, nine are women, and of the 20 to 30 members of each provincial peace committee, two to three are women. Most of the female members of the High Peace Council and provincial peace committees are present whenever they are needed. This small presence is a serious challenge: In meetings in which decisions are made based on votes, “women remain in the minority, and their concerns and issues are not reflected at all.” (Joya 2015) For example, one female member

of the High Peace Council nominated herself as the spokesperson of the High Peace Council, but none of the male members voted for her.

One perspective claims that quantitative presence is not important, but that rather what is important is active and effective participation, which means participation does not equate with better representation. People who can better understand the situation of women, and have the required abilities and do not compromise on women’s rights, should be active even if they are few. (Faizy 2015) However, the most important takeaway is that the increased participation of women or the provision of more shares to women is not ineffective. In other words: “The words or speeches of 3 people are not counted for anything among 30 people, and it is not effective no matter how much they shout and scream.” (Hamidi 2015) Emphasis on increased participation does not necessarily mean ignoring the quality of women’s participation in favor of increasing the number of women in the peace process; quality participation should also be considered. Another strategy is to place women in decision-making positions. If the number of women is small and decision-making positions are also not accessible to them, both the position and effectiveness of women in the peace process will be suspect. Therefore, increasing “the position of women in a decision-making authority and leadership roles will change their participation to an effective participation.” (Jalil 2015)

- **Opposition of the Taliban:**One of the most significant barriers to women’s participation is the pushback from the Taliban and other armed opposition groups. For this reason, some people believe that women’s participation is a serious obstacle to peace and will seriously affect the process. “A requirement of negotiation with the Taliban is the fact that their demands should also be accepted, and they are against women in the negotiation process.” (Zaher 2015) One of the most important concerns is the possibility of a political deal on women’s rights. The ignorance or negligence of women’s rights can be considered an advantage or benefit to the Taliban. (Hamidi 2015). This means that it is possible that, in the peace negotiation process, women’s rights would not be a concern or serious priority to the government and High Peace Council. Irrespective of other challenges, this issue has reduced the importance of women’s participation in the peace process. One women’s rights activist stated her perspective as follows: “Unfortunately for our men and for high-profile members of the High Peace Council, women’s rights is not an important issue. With incorrect definitions and interpretation from the religion, they are

trying to marginalize the role of women and do not allow women to become important for the country at different levels. Experience from other countries of the world has shown that women's participation has been much better and effective in solving conflicts. An example of this is the Philippines." (Kamavi 2015) Most citizens assume that the few women currently serving in the council are there "just for the satisfaction of international society." (Hamdard 2015) In other words, "women are tools through the participation of whom the government is trying obtain the approval of international society so that they do not cut their budget." (Hamidi 2015)

The perspective of women and women's rights activist is that "the current attitude of the High Peace Council towards women is very shameful. There are seven times more men than women in the High Peace Council, and as such none of women's demands are being considered, especially because some of these men are patriarchal and against women." (Kamavi 2015) The female members of provincial peace councils themselves confirm that they do not play an important role in the peace program. One female member of a provincial peace council has stated that: "We will wait until the day comes when we celebrate and go to share the peace adventure and share our messages with people." (Sadaat 2015) The role of women in provincial peace councils is limited to solving family conflicts and participation in projects' opening ceremonies.

- **The sovereignty and dominance of the Taliban mentality:** As stated in the outline of the High Peace Council, specific members of this council are close to the Taliban armed opposition in mentality and civility. This means they at least maintain empathetic or sympathetic views towards the Taliban and armed groups, and that they may defend the Taliban's position and demands. The High Peace Council's calling Mullah Omar, the leader of the Taliban, "mujahid" and organizing his death ceremony is the most visible sign of the Taliban and an anti-women mentality dominant in the High Peace Council (Bazrafghan 2015). This is considered a challenge to women in two ways. First, for the number of High Peace Council members who share the Taliban's views, even the presence of women in the council is an issue for them; they cannot accept it. Second, to achieve the Taliban's acquiescence, they do not provide roles to women. Therefore, the dominant mentality in the High Peace Council is not a supportive one for women's participation. This outlook causes women to be marginalized and their views unheard. (Kamavi 2015)

- **Patriarchal perceptions of peace:** In Afghanistan, war is a masculine phenomenon. Since war is considered a masculine phenomenon, peace is also considered a masculine phenomenon. If peace is required, it should be negotiated between men, not women. Because peace has been considered a male phenomenon, thinking about the role of women could be considered unnecessary and superfluous. (Rafiyee 2015) In addition, there is another point of view that says "women's participation was necessary when men could not do anything; now that men are available and can cover the responsibility, there is no need for women's participation." (Ahmadi 2015) This point of view is a reflection of the traditional and patriarchal views on women's participation in the peace process, which can be considered a serious barrier.
- **Lack of trust in women's capabilities:** The presence of women in the peace process is mostly ceremonial and decorative to promote the legitimacy of the international peace process. It is meant to show others that women also have a presence in this process. In other words, women participate in peace processes because it is inevitable; women's ability to negotiate with the Taliban is not believed or trusted. Therefore, a lack of trust of women is another challenge that reduces the participation of women considered to be ineffective. (Hamdard 1384) This is also the understanding of representatives in the international community; since they do not believe that women are being accepted and listened to, they do not support them when it comes to important political processes.
- **Civil society's weak support of women of the High Peace Council:** The High Peace Council isn't solely responsible for peacebuilding; many civil organizations and institutions have been involved in this process. But these activities and programs are scattered, incoherent, and often irrelevant. The female members of the High Peace Council and women who work outside the council do not have a defined working relationship, but it is very important that all institutions working on peace are linked and their programs coordinated in consideration of a single goal. This way they can support each other and achieve the desired result through collaboration. But the women of the High Peace Council say they are not supported by civil society institutions, and the lack of such support has resulted in women being marginalized by the programs. There is a lot of mistrust and competition between women in civil society and the High Peace Council. Interestingly, when I joined the High Peace Council, my male colleagues advised me to

connect with and reconcile the women of the High Peace Council in order to convince them to speak with one voice—then they would be the strongest block within the High Peace Council, because none of the men would be able to engage themselves in blocks, except in the case of existing in contradiction to women. For the High Peace Council women to be influential at a national political level, they need the support of the civil society in order to legitimize any claims of representing Afghanistan women.

Multiple occupations: Most of the female members of the High Peace Council have significant duties and responsibilities in other places as well. It is natural that having other duties and responsibilities consumes their time and energy, which becomes a barrier to their active participation and presence in the peace program. If they are even present, it is an inactive and ineffective presence. Therefore, multiple occupations is one challenge to women's participation in the peace process.

Another aspect is threats to the security and social integrity of women who are actively involved and outspoken in the peace process.

Considering these challenges and barriers, is there an assurance that the voices of women can be heard in peace negotiations? Is there a mechanism that can be used to ensure that women's voices are heard in the peace negotiation process and that their rights are not compromised?

The president's office has emphasized that the protection of women's civil rights is the red line in negotiations with the Taliban, and the practical national plans for the implementation of resolution 1325 emphasize that the "protection of the achievements of the past decade in relation to the human rights of women and their access to education and employment are among the red lines of this negotiation." (Foreign Ministry of Afghanistan 1393) But apart besides these commitments, there is no other guarantee and assurance. (Forough 2015) So far, the practical mechanism for ensuring women's voices are heard in peace negotiations does not exist. The national action plan for the implementation of resolution 1325 and Afghanistan's constitutional law is the legal cover for this matter, but these are not sufficient on their own. Women need to rise to support these initiatives. Whenever women speak up, they can force the government and any other institution to consider their demands through civil strategies. (Habibi 2015) Maximum support is important and required if women are to have a share in the leadership of the council. (Moman 2015)

Conclusion:

What we wanted to achieve in this report was a review of a gender perspective on women's participation in the peace process. In this perspective, women's participation is important for a just, widespread, and sustainable peace. Women have different issues and demands compared to men; they can play different roles in the peace process. But research findings show that the current state of women's participation is not desirable. By both qualitative and quantitative measures, women do not have an effective role in the peace process, and there are various serious challenges to achieving women's participation. Considering these challenges and the current minimal participation of women in the peace process, it is imperative that women's rights—and the achievements of last decade—are not sacrificed for peace. These challenges have resulted in women remaining largely ineffective in formal peace processes. There is no comprehensive mechanism through which it could be assured that women's voices are heard in negotiation and peace dialogues. Considering this key point, the conclusion we can draw is: We have a long way to go before we achieve peace based on a gender perspective.

Recommendations:

1. Increase the number of women in the peace process. To realize peace from a gender perspective and to bolster women's efficacy in this process, an increase in the number of women involved in the peace process is essential. In both the High Peace Council and provincial peace councils, the number of women should increase based on expertise, capability, and commitment. This is dependent on revising High Peace Council regulations.
2. Establish defined, clear, and effective roles for women in the peace process. Concrete roles for women should be defined at all levels and stages of the peace process. Women should become integrated into the leadership of the High Peace Council and participate in programming not only as advisors but also as decision makers. Their plans and actions should be feasible.
3. Transfer women's involvement from informal peace processes to formal peace processes. Women's efforts in informal peace processes are noticeable and important. Many women are active in this area, working with high energy and commitment. It is essential that this energy and commitment be transferred to formal processes.

4. Coordinate peace and security efforts among the networks and institutions working for peace. Many civil institutions are working in the area of peace and security without information from and awareness of each other. This separation and lack of communication negatively affects the efficacy of their work. It is essential that they coordinate their work, activities, and programs and state their critiques, concerns, recommendations, and demands from a single vantage point.
5. Give citizens—and women—access to information. No negotiation or deal with armed groups should be enacted without informing female representatives. Women should have access to all information related to negotiation and peace dialogues, preconditions, and demands and promises.
6. Include women's participation in the national action plan and the plan for implementing resolution 1325. The national action plan is one of the most important legal documents to support the increase of women's participation in the peace process. As this plan is prepared and compiled, it should implement, in detail, how women can cooperate, and a committee should be formed to evaluate and implement this plan so this specific process is followed. The national action plan for resolution 1325 is a very strong lobby instrument for international support. It also offers ways to widen the scope of women in peace and security and build strong alliances with other ministries and institutions, like security and social welfare institutions.
7. Establish a transparent and practical mechanism to follow up with women's demands. A specific and clear mechanism should be defined so that women can be assured that their voices are being heard in peace dialogues and negotiations.
8. Give female members of peace negotiations communication channels to Afghanistan women. Women in the High Peace Council and provincial peace councils need to have a constituency behind them in order to have the authority to speak on women's behalf. Likewise, it is important to convince male colleagues and make them allies who support women's issues in negotiations.
9. Determine who is going to decide who participates in peace talks, such as those in Muree. This is not only a decision made by the High Peace Council. For this reason, the president's office, Security Council, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs are important partners in pushing for women's participation.
10. The international community should be serious in supporting the implementation

of the national action plan for resolution 1325 and should support women's participation in mediation and mediation support teams. Three female ambassadors (Canada, Finland, Great Britain) may be supportive in advocacy. The European Union also has a special program to support women in the peace process.

11. The High Peace Council women participated in a seminar in Berlin where they met with two women from Indonesia and Yemen to learn about and discuss strategies for how women could gain a role in negotiations and go from simply participating to being listened to. Both worked women worked very diligently to gain knowledge that their male colleagues didn't have and to add a unique perspective to the peace process. One recommendation would be to establish and train a group of women (experts from the High Peace Council, provincial peace councils, parliament, Security Council, government, and academia) as a support team for mediation and peace talks. This would allow them to gain expertise in mediation, learn about peace talks sequencing, and to gain knowledge about topics like constitutional law, international law, security issues, disarmament, and drafting peace agreements.

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You will read:

Without women, peace processes are not sustainable, pervasive, or just. Considering gender before, during, and after the peace process is synonymous with overseeing the balance and harmony of the peace. This approach emphasizes female participation and believes in a compromise between the genders when approaching peace, developing expectations of peace, and establishing pre-conditions in peace processes. This gender-inclusive approach allows men and women to participate equally in peace-building and contribute equally to the implementation of peace programs; this participation should allow both men and women the independence to express their needs for a peace-building process, as opposed to creating a predominantly male discussion that women simply uphold.

