

International Afghanistan Conference in Bonn  
*Afghan Youth Vision 2014 and Beyond*

December 01, 2011

*Preamble*

Afghanistan has had a unique relation with nations across the world over the last ten years. Despite the reviving political and economic ties with a lot of countries, we are yet to be embraced a reliable partner by many. Security, peaceful transition to self-reliance, basic service delivery to all, and economic growth and development have significant presence in any national or international agenda related to the future of Afghanistan. Afghanistan's engagement with the regional and international actors is critical at this juncture for ensuring its stability, bolstering its economy and promoting national solidarity.

This paper aims to bring to the attention of the participants of the Bonn Conference expressions of the hopes and aspirations of young Afghans and their vision for the future of the nation.

We, the young Afghans, across the nation join hands in unison and send our appeal to the Afghan government, the international community and the Afghan and international civil society members. The Afghanistan Young Leaders Initiative (AYLI) pursues these issues in shaping its vision, and presents the following recommendations to the participants at the International Afghanistan Conference in Bonn.

*Socio-Economic Development*

We believe that Afghanistan's economic development lies on cultivating the wealth of the nation, educating its people; protecting the rights of the vulnerable, nurturing a sense of national solidarity, and Afghanistan's active presence in the regional and international arena.

International assistance in Afghanistan can only be effective when it backs up Afghanistan's own development efforts through building of state institutions. It is critical that the legitimacy of the state and government is firmly established and the government's authority is spread across the length and breadth of the country.

Poverty in Afghanistan affects an estimated 36% of the population, and a large percentage is highly vulnerable to falling into the poverty trap. Afghanistan's long-term partnership strategies with the international community can be of immense assistance if the international partners avoid quick-impact and visible short-term solutions; and focus instead on improving the quality of life of the people, thereby earning their trust and confidence. With such anticipation, we put forth the following propositions:

- The government must develop an economic model as a part of the country's economic transition plan. The model could be based on its comparative advantages such as the country's endowments in natural resources, potentials of cultivation of varied agricultural products for domestic consumption and export, and its critical geographical location at the center of trade and transit routes in south and central Asia.
- Afghanistan's rapid population growth rate of 2.8% is an issue of concern especially under the existing security and socio-economic challenges. A national census is non-existent and the population is estimated to increase to 82 million by 2050. A long-term strategy to balance population vs. socio-economic growth is required today.
- Investments in long term economic development areas such as agriculture, mining, energy and infrastructure that would generate both short and longer-term employment opportunities for Afghans are absolutely essential. Such investments would enable the Afghans to increase income and mitigate the potentials of slipping into the poverty trap.
- It must be noted that ignoring regional political and security factors would adversely affect our economic relations in the region and lower our potentials of economic benefits. Any disconnect with the regional partners have the potentials of generating an imbalance in our regional diplomatic relations, with which our nation's security and stability are so intricately connected. Therefore attaining a comprehensive approach towards improving country's regional economic cooperation is of immense importance.
- An Economic Planning Commission to act as a center of gravity for overall economic planning and coordination in the country should be established. The Commission should enable the government in providing leadership at the planning process and take ownership for all planning efforts. Since 2002, Government of Afghanistan has prepared six development frameworks but a disconnect between planning and their translation into action still persists. The Economic Planning Commission should serve as a policy and strategic think-tank to the President and his cabinet.

- Development of the private sector as an engine of growth and sustainable economic development is also very critical. The private sector development strategy must be focused on nurturing small and medium enterprises mainly at the sub-national levels.

### *Security and Political Transition*

The planned military transition is at the forefront of international engagement in Afghanistan. The backbone of any such transition is building of sustainable Afghan economy and political institutions legitimate in the eyes of Afghan population. We believe that:

- Withdrawal of international forces is likely to have an immense impact on Afghanistan's stabilization process. Troop's withdrawal is being planned in the absence of any visible sign of improvement in the quality of defense and security forces. Both Afghan government and International Community should adopt practical and effective measures to avoid retracting the current levels of assistance or generate shortfalls that might lead to the breakdown of institutions built over the last 10 years;
- The Afghan government, with support of the people, must adopt clear-cut and transparent national security policies by strengthening and defining the mandates of its security institutions, determine the red-lines, and avoid duplication of efforts.
- Because of a disconnect between the law enforcement agencies and the unavailability of per-capita police, attorneys, and judges, there is a need that these institutions should be equally developed, their coordination strengthened, with a holistic approach to the rule of law.
- The sustainability of legitimate political institutions, as envisioned in the constitution of Afghanistan, is key to its long-term stability. This can be done, for instance, through promoting formation of national and regional political parties and a positive change to the electoral law, and fostering a strong non-interference pact with Afghanistan neighbors offering them incentives and countermeasures.
- International experience shows that peace and reconciliation will come from a position of strength – economically, politically and militarily. To achieve peace in Afghanistan, we need to identify which group of Taliban is willing to sit with the government through appropriate trust and confidence building measures to facilitate the negotiation and peace pact.
- Afghanistan must prioritize implementation of its sub-national governance policy, particularly the reform of provincial planning and budgeting, with increased resources transferred to sub national levels and de-concentration of authority to these levels in order to bring decision making on development spending closer to the beneficiaries.

### *Service Delivery*

The Government and International Community have not been entirely accountable during the last ten years through a mainstream monitoring mechanism. A number of monitoring boards and organizations have either been government or donor driven who have not taken into account the genuine interests of the people. This has led to fragmented planning and implementation of projects across the country, with no or minimum means of accountability to the people. Since Service delivery and clear accountability can be used as a means for trust building between the government and the people, we propose that:

- A Monitoring Board to be established with members drawn from civil society at the national and sub-national levels, with members from the Afghan National Assembly, international community and the government. This Board, neither government nor donor driven, will monitor and evaluate the country's planning and service delivery on the ground and to measure its impact on the people.
- Reaching out to the people in remotest villages and districts should become the core priority of the government in order to draw support for the peace-building process. The Afghanistan government should focus on streamlining and coordinating service delivery at the sub-national levels to cover for the donor countries' fragmented attention to these areas in the past years.
- With 2014 transition process in sight, the government's ability in reforming bureaucracies and strengthening procurement policies are considered critical for improved service delivery for the public at sub-national levels.

*Afghanistan Young Leaders Initiative is a non-partisan and non-political group of young Afghans who share common values and beliefs to address the social, economic and political issues in Afghanistan. Our aim is to mobilize the youth for taking part in critical nation-building initiatives and advocate for positive changes in building a secure, safe and equitable Afghan society.*