

Seize this moment. Give negotiations a real chance.

The current situation bears the potential to serve as an opportunity to recognize the role that Taliban and other Afghan political leaders can play now to steer away the country from further conflict. Any resumption of armed conflict will significantly worsen the situation for the Afghan people.

Since Sunday August 15th, people inside and outside Afghanistan have been shocked by the sudden collapse of the government and by the ensuing void and uncertainty. The desperate attempts by Afghans to flee demonstrate the depth of fear and mistrust. Either the country will further descend into chaos or conflict or this can be a turning point to build a truly inclusive Afghanistan which can offer a better life for all Afghans.

Whether trust in Afghanistan's new political leadership can be established, largely depends on decisions of the Taliban leadership, as well as other Afghan leaders and those of the international community. There is a very brief window of opportunity that must not be frittered away at any cost.

Given this sudden and historic change and the achievements of the past 20 years, the Heart of Asia Society (HAS) implores all parties, Taliban leadership, all political leaders in Afghanistan as well as the international community to seize this moment and work in concert for a better future for the Afghan people.

HAS urges Taliban and other Afghan sides:

- **Taliban should continue to practice restraint from unilaterally establishing their Emirate.** Up until recently, Taliban leaders stated repeatedly that they did not intend on establishing an Emirate. They have also emphasized that they will accept a system that is inclusive and just for all Afghans. It is critical that the Taliban leadership stand by these promises.

- **Avoid a humanitarian crisis.** All parties should be informed about the vast scope and impact of the ongoing humanitarian crisis on millions of Afghans across the country. Conflict coupled with drought, internal displacements of people, COVID-19 pandemic, and unemployment have put millions of Afghans in great danger. Immediately addressing and alleviating this humanitarian crisis must take priority for all parties and must mobilize efforts to respond to quickly. Any resumption of armed conflict could significantly worsen a situation that is already a major humanitarian disaster.

- **Recognize and respect the diversity in Afghanistan.** Afghan leaders have stated repeatedly that they believe in diversity and inclusion. This is the moment to show to the Afghan people and the global community that diversity and a meaningful inclusion of all Afghans, especially women, youth, and minorities is the only way forward for a prosperous and sovereign Afghanistan.

- **Allow freedom of movement and travel.** All Afghans and non-Afghan nationals who are currently in Afghanistan and wish to travel outside the country should have the freedom to do so. The Afghan people who worked in different capacities with the government, national and international NGOs in Afghanistan for the past 20 years are great assets for any future administration.

However, in order for these individuals to feel safe to go back to work, Taliban and other parties must refrain from interfering in their work. **Nevertheless, with the lingering uncertainty, people who choose to travel outside should be provided with safe passages and must be allowed to practice their freedom.**

- **Respect the tri-color national flag of the Afghan people.** The tri-color national flag of Afghanistan has a long history. It belongs to all Afghans and does not represent a single party. Taliban and all Afghan leaders must avoid imposing their party flag on the Afghan people.

- **Not engage in retaliation against former government officials or any other Afghans,** including through arrest, revenge killing, etc. The current vacuum in leadership has led to further lawlessness, disorder, and has put ordinary Afghans in danger. We implore all parties to not engage in looting, robbery, revenge killing and respect the order in their communities. Taliban and others who are currently controlling the security situation must help avoid and prevent such actions.

- **Afghan parties must continue the -**

ongoing negotiations. This means that all relevant parties engaged in the peace process over the past two years must give negotiations a real chance. It is only through negotiations and diplomacy that the current crisis will end.

- **Reports and allegations of human rights violations** such as arbitrary arrests, killing, forced entry into private homes, seizure of private property, forced marriages, etc. in any part of the country must be investigated by independent Afghan and international bodies and reports made public immediately.

The international community, including neighbors, the region, UN, European and NATO countries:

- **Enhance coordination and synergy, and engage Taliban with a unified voice.** This will enhance the international community's leverage and increase the chances of a genuine inclusive political transition.

- **Not agree to a deal that would include recognition and support of a regime** that does not abide by global standards. These include respecting international treaties that Afghanistan entered in the past 20 years, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a system in which all Afghans are

- It is the obligation of all Afghans to build on the gains of the past 20 years. The contribution of billions of dollars from the international community in support of a democratic Afghanistan led to significant progress in infrastructure, education, healthcare, opportunities for Afghan women and girls, and a vibrant media and civil society. Any threat to these achievements of the Afghan people and the international community must be averted.

equal and equally represented without any discrimination, and keeping the sovereignty of Afghanistan.

- **Future foreign assistance to Afghanistan must remain conditioned** on a peaceful and inclusive polity, including the establishment of a government that represents and reflects the diversity of Afghan society, including women, ethnic and religious minorities, respect for the rule of law, national laws and international treaties to which Afghanistan is a party.

Immediately addressing and alleviating the humanitarian crisis must take priority for all parties and must mobilize efforts to respond to quickly. Any resumption of armed conflict could significantly worsen a situation that is already a major humanitarian disaster.

- **The Taliban appear keen to work with the EU.** Therefore, alone and by working with regional and other global powers, the EU must play an active role in the ongoing international diplomacy to encourage and convince Taliban toward supporting an inclusive national government in Afghanistan.

The current situation bears the potential to serve as an opportunity to recognize the role that Taliban and other political leaders can play now to steer away the country from further conflict. What happens in the next few days and weeks to come will have a lasting effect on the people of Afghanistan, the political structure in the country, and the future of Afghanistan on the global stage. A failure of the necessary political transition will be deeply unfortunate and leave its negative impact on Afghanistan as well as the stability of the region.

While we remain hopeful, we have received and witnessed some disturbing news across Afghanistan as well. **Taliban and others must know that the Afghan people and the world is watching.** If the intention is to end the conflict, all must work for the stability of Afghanistan, end terrorizing Afghans and provide the opportunity for an equal and open society. That is why we are appealing to all parties, Taliban and other Afghan leaders as well as the international community to fulfill the promises made and to work for a better and prosperous Afghanistan. The Afghan people have suffered tremendously. This is the moment that all must recognize and work collectively for the Afghan people and Afghanistan.

For Peace and Stability in Afghanistan,

The Heart of Asia Society

8/18/21