



## Statement

### Civil Society Consultative Gathering - West Zone

**3<sup>rd</sup> December 2022**

**Herat, Afghanistan**

The Voice of the Afghan People (VAP), in the series of consultative gatherings across the country, today organized the Civil Society Consultative Gathering in Herat province. The summit brought together 120 women and 145 men civil society activists, including university lecturers, religious scholars, tribal and community elders, youth, journalists, the business community, people with disabilities, minorities, and victims of war. Those gathered came from the districts and centers of the five provinces of the western zone; Herat, Ghor, Badghis, Farah, and Nimruz.

Mawlana Naeem-ul-Haq Haqqani, Director of Information and Culture of Herat, joined the gathering on behalf of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) and stated that such gatherings are essential in collecting public voices and inputs. He added that "Every system may have shortcomings that could be overcome through people's cooperation and participation."

On behalf of the western zone civil society, Sayed Mohammad Mahdi Afzali spoke on the importance of dialogue and called it essential for finding the truth, eliminating bias and misunderstanding, promoting mutual acceptance, and expanding the relationship between people.

Masoma Jami, the VAP steering committee member, talked about women's role and position according to Islam. She added that although women played an important and essential role throughout Islamic history, they now face significant challenges regarding access to education, employment, and political and social participation. She asked for people and the authorities to work together to ensure that women can access their Islamic rights.

In the latter part of the day, participants split into working groups and discussed their communities' existing challenges and problems and solutions.

They made the following suggestions:

1. According to the participants, the international community's economic sanctions on Afghanistan have adversely affected the Afghan people. The continuation of these sanctions will further worsen the living conditions of the people. Therefore, the participants call on the international community to lift these sanctions immediately to revive the country's economic cycle and improve the living conditions of the public.
2. The participants expressed concerns about the lack of necessary health services, including hospitals, experienced health personnel, quality medicines, and other health facilities. They called on the IEA and the international community, mainly World Health Organization (WHO), to take necessary measures.
3. The participants were unsatisfied with the way their legal cases are being addressed by the local judicial system and urged the authorities to maintain justice and the people's access to fair and impartial courts.
4. For an effective and constructive interaction, the authorities should be accessible to the public efficiently, and the people's voices must be heard. Additionally, civil society organizations should be allowed to operate freely as a bridge between the public and the authorities. Therefore, the participants of this consultative gathering asked the IEA to treat people, especially those holding different views, with tolerance.
5. The participants believe that the inappropriate customs and traditions based on injustice and oppression, such as 'Baad' [The forced marriage to end animosity], forced and under-aged marriages, and dowry [money for the bride's family] are causing various problems for people and need to be eliminated. They called on the IEA to tackle these problems in collaboration with the tribal and community elders and religious scholars.
6. According to the participants, the security conditions have improved across the country, so it's time to address the youth's unemployment problem by implementing development projects. Currently, youth are encountering economic and social challenges that cause psychological problems, brain drain, illegal and unsafe migration, and drug addiction.
7. The participants of the gathering believe education to be citizens' fundamental right and its provision to be one of the government's primary responsibilities. Therefore, they called on the IEA authorities to provide equal education and employment opportunities for all people, particularly girls, children, and women.
8. Considering the current economic and humanitarian crisis, the participants reiterated that the international community's humanitarian aid is insufficient and called for increased

humanitarian aid. Additionally, they demanded restarting development projects so that poverty and unemployment are reduced in a systematic and sustainable way.

The participants thanked VAP for such a constructive and productive initiative in the western zone. Moreover, they called these gatherings effective in identifying and addressing public issues and asked VAP to organize similar events in their provinces.