

STRENGTHEN AFGHAN CIVIL SOCIETY AND RESPOND TO THE SEVERE HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN THE COUNTRY

The two civil society platforms, Association of Afghan Organisations in Germany (VAFO) and Association of Development Policy and Humanitarian Aid of German Non-Governmental Organisations (VENRO), together with representatives of Afghan civil society inside and outside Afghanistan, are sharing our demands for the actions we believe the German government should urgently take with regard to the current severe crises in Afghanistan. This document has been drafted following discussions within a consultation process with actors of the Afghan civil society in Afghanistan and Germany. Further demands have been taken from the conference “A strong civil society - Chances for Afghanistan?”, which took place on October 7 of 2022 in Berlin. This document is structured around the three main demands of Afghan women to the current de facto authorities: Nān (Bread) – Kār (Work/Employment) – Āzādi (Freedom).

The Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021, followed by economic sanctions, withdrawal of official development cooperation, and political isolation on the international level, precipitated a dire humanitarian and economic crisis. Afghan women and children, particularly girls, have been affected the most. After two decades of hard-earned achievements, Afghan women are once again deprived of their basic human rights in education, employment, freedom of expression and movement. The de facto authorities have gradually initiated policies, which seem to enable a state governance model based on gender apartheid. Meanwhile, the country's economic crisis has forced almost the entire population below the poverty line, with limited access to health care and other basic needs.

For a long time, the Federal Government of Germany has played a significant role in Afghanistan, providing humanitarian and development aid, and strengthening the economy through job creation and capacity building. Germany was pivotal in restoring the country's war-struck infrastructure in many areas, including training the Afghan administrative sector.

In support of the people of Afghanistan, we request the Federal Government of Germany to lead and coordinate a profoundly revised international response to the many crises in Afghanistan. With its strong political and diplomatic stance in the international community and its feminist foreign policy guidance, Germany has a special responsibility to find a new international response to the most severe women's rights crisis.

Germany as potential lead advocate for the people of Afghanistan should

1. On an international level with regard to human rights:
 - use its UN Human Rights Council membership to push for a UN mechanism to monitor human rights, collect and verify the evidence of crimes committed in Afghanistan, and ensure accountability.
 - call on the members of the United Nations Security Council to permanently end all exceptions to travel bans for Taliban leaders and to explore adding additional Taliban leaders to the list of sanctioned individuals based on their responsibility for rights violations.
 - diplomatically push the Taliban to lift the ban on girls' secondary education through a more robust cooperation with like-minded governments currently having a seat in the United Nations Security Council.
 - fund networks for accountability and awareness raising (social media, traditional media) as they can be vital in monitoring Afghanistan's ongoing human rights situation and providing more in-depth insights into the situation on the ground.

2. On the international level with regard to enabling and giving a voice to the people of Afghanistan:
 - advocate for the inclusion and representation of Afghan civil society representatives, including women's rights defenders, in all relevant international fora on Afghanistan.
 - condition agreements with the Taliban to allow for equal participation of women in all areas of society, including employment, politics, education, judicial, and healthcare systems.
3. On the international level with regard to strengthening civil society:
 - relocate its funding to civil society in Afghanistan and design criteria for civil-society-funded programs that enable more women to be included, strengthen smaller initiatives, and reach the rural areas of Afghanistan.
 - insist on the independence of the NGOs in Afghanistan. The de facto authorities are aiming to have monetary control over the NGOs in Afghanistan. NGOs' autonomy in work will immunise their programs from the influence of the Taliban.
 - together with like-minded governments pressure the de facto authorities to maintain the 2005 NGO law and enable safe ways for cash transfers of international organisations to Afghanistan in order to reach people in need.
 - Germany should support evacuated Afghan civil society representatives and Afghan diaspora representatives in strengthening their ties among each other and finding common positions and voice.
4. On the national level with regard to strengthening Afghan civil society:
 - create an institutionalised permanent dialogue between the Federal Foreign Office and the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development where the decisions on policies for Afghanistan are discussed and prepared in consideration of and exchange with Afghan civil society representatives, including women and international civil society organisations.

- extend and expand its protection programs for newly evacuated Afghan civil society representatives, human rights defenders, women, people with disabilities, and members of religious and other minorities.
- strengthen existing publicly funded personal exchange programs to strengthen networking between different parts of Afghan diaspora.

The German Bundestag has a key role in monitoring Afghanistan's human rights situation and the international response. The recently installed Enquiry Commission on the previous German engagement in Afghanistan is an important signal for learning from past mistakes. The debate on improving support for an independent Afghanistan must be upheld in parliamentary committees, plenary discussions, and delegations in Afghanistan or neighbouring countries.

Food insecurity

More than half of Afghanistan's population needs humanitarian assistance, and six million are at risk of death from famine. At least one million children are suffering from life-threatening malnutrition. Therefore, food insecurity is a major contributor to the rising mortality among adults and children. We are requesting the following:

- Humanitarian assistance must be expanded and increased to reach the rising number of people in starvation and malnutrition. Those in particular need of urgent help are women-led households/single-mother families, mothers and children at risk of malnutrition, people with disabilities and ethnic minorities.
- A robust mechanism must be installed to ensure fair distribution, through all existing channels, including the UN organisations, across all provinces and people in Afghanistan. The distribution must be free of interference or control through the de facto authorities and according to humanitarian principles.
- The central bank reserves belong to the people of Afghanistan and have been designated to fulfil important central bank tasks. Until the people of Afghanistan have elected a legitimate government, the central bank reserves outside

of Afghanistan should remain frozen in order to serve as guaranty for financial stability and economic activities in the future.

- Germany should expand its support to the victims of the recent natural disasters that have affected thousands of families, depriving them of housing, clean water and health care.

Employment and basic services

Following the return of the current de facto authorities, thousands of skilled professionals including lawyers, judges, teachers, former members of the Afghan security forces and civil servants employed by national and international organisations lost their jobs. As a result, unemployment rates soared, leading to a worsening of poverty and food insecurity. We are suggesting the following initial steps to prevent a further deterioration of the situation:

- Germany should work in a sustainable manner with other donors in capacity development to improve perspectives of employment through vocational training.
- Germany should enable a transaction system with which individuals and organisations can directly transfer money to Afghanistan to support people and fund projects.
- Germany should expand funding to services in education and health care at the local and provincial level through international trust funds or other independent bodies. This needs to be conditioned to full access of women to all forms of education and health care services.
- The possibility of virtual education should be considered for higher or informal education. Virtual partnerships with universities and institutions of adult education should be preserved.