



**Women's Peace & Humanitarian Fund**

A United Nations & Civil Society Partnership



# STRENGTHENING SOCIAL CAPITAL OF YOUNG AFGHAN WOMEN FOR ADVANCING PEACE

## DUSHANBE PEACE ADVOCACY CONFERENCE - MENTORING-DIALOGUES - BUILDING SOLIDARITY NETWORKS

**NARRATIVE REPORT**

**10 MAY 2024**



# 1.BACKGROUND

Omid International (OI) was founded by Rahela Sidiqi, an Afghan women peace builder and a former senior Advisor at the Afghanistan Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission. Having been persecuted, she was forced to flee her country. Living a life of a refugee, she founded an organization outside of Afghanistan to continue her mission to support the Afghan women and girls and pursue her goal of bringing Afghan women to the forefront of efforts to build peace and development in Afghanistan. OI's main objective is to aid Afghan women and youth in promoting women's rights, and democratic values, and countering extremism. Many of the Afghan women who are at risk and are being targeted, have received support from OI both in Afghanistan and while seeking asylum in other nations.

To cultivate and guide emerging Afghan youth advocates, the peace advocacy conference, mentoring, dialogues and building solidarity aimed at training them in participatory planning for peace advocacy efforts. The focus was on enhancing the involvement and participation of young generation of women in Afghanistan's peace building process.

The overall strategy is to support a Track 2 formal political (peace) process by building trust of stakeholders and contributing to increasing Afghan women's participation in political (peace) dialogues and peace building process through various platforms by engaging the beneficiaries as partners in the process. Thus, networking, and regional, and international advocacy would be the key elements of the strategy. Ensuring Afghan diaspora support to women and girls in Afghanistan and those struggling as refugees is essential to contributing to sustainable peacebuilding and gender equality in the country. It will be ensured that a sensitive "do no harm" approach is taken to safeguard the interests of the Afghan women to prevent any unintended adverse impact.



# 1. PRE- CONFERENCE

The OI director embarked on her most challenging endeavor yet, rallying her entire team to organize a peace conference and dialogues. Managing these programs across different countries with participants from around the globe posed numerous logistical hurdles. This included selecting locations, venues, panelists, speakers, and participants from diverse backgrounds.

Choosing the most impactful subjects was crucial for fostering peace, facilitating peace negotiations, and transferring knowledge to young women. Many articles were written on these topics, meticulously reviewed by the OI team, and presented by the authors during the conference and dialogues.



### **3. INTERNATIONAL/REGIONAL PEACE ADVOCACY CONFERENCE, DUSHANBE, TAJIKISTAN, 4-6 DECEMBER 2023**

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Welcome to the forefront of change. At Omid International, we are dedicated to empowering Afghan women, nurturing their voices, and paving the way for peace and prosperity in Afghanistan. Our recent International/Regional Peace Advocacy Conference, held from 4th to 6th December 2023 in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, stands as a beacon of hope in the pursuit of a brighter future.

#### **3.1. CONFERENCE OVERVIEW:**

Our conference aimed to bolster a Track 2 process, fostering stakeholder trust and amplifying the participation of young Afghan women in peace dialogues and peace-building endeavors. We identified four vital pathways to peace, emphasizing the urgent need for:

1. Balanced gender representation in peace negotiations.
2. Ensuring Afghan women's safety and security.
3. Empowering through education.
4. Promoting economic and financial empowerment.

#### **3.2. KEY HIGHLIGHTS:**

Gathering approximately 70 participants both in-person and virtually, including young Afghan asylum seekers and refugee women from across the globe, our conference was a testament to unity and solidarity. Esteemed representatives from the EU Parliament, UN agencies, and high-level political actors lent their voices to the dialogue, underscoring the significance of our shared mission.

#### **3.3. PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATION:**

Omid International, in partnership with the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund and their financial support, conducted this conference with the technical support of Cordaid.

In collaboration with the Centre for Afghanistan and Regional Studies (CARS) in Tajikistan, we meticulously organized and executed the event, ensuring its lawful conduct and comprehensive thematic focus. Our agenda, developed through extensive consultations with young Afghan women, built upon previous workshops and virtual dialogues, ensuring a participatory and inclusive approach.

### 3.4. CALL TO ACTION:

As participants of this transformative conference, we issue a resounding call to international actors and the Afghan diaspora to support our collective vision for peace and empowerment. Our demands span across four pivotal themes:

1. Young Afghan women's participation in peace processes and dialogues.
2. Ensuring Afghan women's safety and security.
3. Facilitating access to education and fostering peacebuilding.
4. Promoting economic empowerment for sustainable peace dividends.

### 3.5. URGENT STEPS FOR LASTING IMPACT:

Recognizing the importance of immediate action, we advocate for principles and feasible short-term measures to pave the way for long-term change and durable peace. Peace advocacy, peace education, and awareness raising, Scholarship support, visa facilitation, investment in Afghan women-led businesses, and online education are just a few avenues through which we can empower Afghan women and youth, both inside and outside the country for their impactful increased engagement in the peace process.

Together, let us stand as champions of progress, architects of peace, and advocates for change. Join us in our mission to empower Afghan women, transform communities, and forge a path toward lasting peace and prosperity in Afghanistan and beyond.



## 4. POST-CONFERENCE DIALOGUES

### OMID INTERNATIONAL PEACE ADVOCACY AND DIALOGUES ACTION ACROSS BORDERS

A group of 223 young intellectual women from Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Europe, Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan, along with 45 women who participated in a pre-conference consultation, conducted mostly face-to-face and some hybrid meetings. The majority participated in person to discuss the involvement of young Afghan women in the peace process and advocate for policy changes through awareness raising and policy advocacy dialogues. During the meeting, they outlined their suggestions and insights.

#### 4.1. FOLLOW-UP DIALOGUE: TAJIKISTAN SECOND FOLLOW-UP DIALOGUE

On February 29, 2024, in Dushanbe, Omid International convened a dialogue following the "Strengthening Social Capital of Young Afghan Women for Advancing Peace" conference of December 4-6, 2023 with active participation of 25 individuals, comprising 15 Afghan women and 10 representatives from the United Nations.

The objective of this dialogue was to discuss the Call for Action document and explore strategies for international actors and UN agencies to contribute to its implementation. Moderated by Zakia Alizada (OI peace advocate) and Malika Jurakulova (Head of UNwomen Tajikistan ) with panelists Fatima Jafari, Farzana Alizada, Latifa Abdul Manon, the event also featured speakers such as Parvathy Ramaswami (UN Resident Coordinator, Tajikistan), Hanifa Sultani (Chair of the Afghan Women Immigrant Council in Tajikistan), and other distinguished participants.

#### 4.2. KEY HIGHLIGHTS AND COMMITMENTS:

Mrs, Parvati (UN):

- Emphasized the UN's commitment to supporting the multi stakeholder platform for peacebuilding.
- Highlighted UN agencies' focus on improving Afghan women's lives in Tajikistan through various initiatives.



## UNICEF

- Acknowledged limitations in operations in Afghanistan but expressed willingness to share the call for action with colleagues in Afghanistan.
- Offered assistance with documents and employment guidance within their scope.

## UN Women:

- Acknowledged ongoing discussions with the High Commissioner in Tajikistan.
- Shared ongoing projects aimed at empowering Afghan women refugees in Tajikistan.

## UNFPA:

- Committed to giving more attention to Afghan women's issues in meetings.
- Discussed efforts toward integration between Afghan and Tajik people.

## UNHCR:

- Discussed limitations in operations but offered support through programs like distant education.
- Expressed willingness to assist in organizational establishment and provided resources for domestic violence.

## IOM:

- Offered support for projects but highlighted the need for leadership for cooperation.
- Provided assistance with planning and offered resources across various sectors.

Collaborating with various stakeholders, the United Nations prioritizes investing in Afghan women's education, economic opportunities, and leadership roles. Placing women at the forefront of peace processes is key to fostering a fairer, more peaceful future for Afghanistan and beyond.



## 4.2. PEACE ADVOCACY AND AWARENESS SESSION IN ALMATY, KAZAKHSTAN

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Omid International conducted a workshop in Almaty, Kazakhstan on Sunday, 17th March 2024, demonstrating a commitment to empowering Afghan women and fostering positive change.

We convened 35 participants, including mentors and young Afghan women leaders, at the Community Center in Almaty. The workshop focused on key themes: Young Afghan Women's Participation in Peace Processes, Women's Safety and Security, Education and Peacebuilding, and impact of women economic empowerment in peace building process. Our overarching goal is clear: to raise public awareness and increase Afghan women engagement for peace and prosperity. Through collaborative efforts and innovative solutions, we are collectively shaping a brighter, more inclusive future for Afghanistan.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all participants for their active engagement and dedication to driving positive change by highlighting the key points below. Special thanks to our mentors (Farahnaz Mahsheed, Shamsi Gul Gul Mir, Nikbakht Rezayee, Zakia Noori) for their guidance and support. Particularly, we express our gratitude to our main coach and mentor, Mrs. Rahela Sediqi, for her hard work in coaching and mentoring throughout the process.





## 4.2.1. KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

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- Advocated for a peace app and art workshops to engage Afghan girls in peace discussions.
- Suggested tech contests, peace ambassador programs, and virtual reality peace practice for empowerment.
- Highlighted storytelling platforms and youth peace forums as avenues for expression and collaboration.
- Recommended travel opportunities for Afghan girls to broaden their understanding of peace.
- Called for investigating root causes of mental distress and implementing psychological education programs.
- Advocated for support networks and international coordination to protect women's rights during protests.
- Proposed dialogues with international organizations and Taliban leaders to advocate for girls' education.
- Suggested revising the educational curriculum and establishing community libraries with peace education materials and share the updated successful peace engagement.
- Recommended dual scholarships (sister and brother) and international advocacy for increased educational opportunities for Afghan girls within Afghanistan.
- Formed an economic committee to promote Afghan women business in Kazakhstan.
- Outlined roles and skills needed, creation of a business plan, and setting up stalls in Almaty.
- Secured financial support for the market and provided legal assistance for Afghan students transitioning to work visas.
- Investment in additional peace awareness dialogues for Afghan women in Kazakhstan and other regions.

Thanks from Mr. Omar Mohammad Sarwar, Deputy Director of the Center for Social and Legal Assistance to Refugees "Úmit," and Deputy Senator of the Kazakhstan Parliament, for generously collaborating with the venue.



## 4.3. ONLINE EUROPE DIALOGUE: ADVOCATING FOR PEACE AND EMPOWERMENT

The OI Peace Advocacy Dialogue convened on March 25, 2024, under the moderation of Manizha Isaar. Distinguished panelists included Mrs. Rahela Sediqi, Richard Bennett, Maliha Shirzay, and Mitra Tanomand. This dynamic dialogue united various stakeholders, notably the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Afghanistan, representatives from the Women's Peace & Humanitarian Fund, and resilient young Afghan women.

The primary goal of the dialogue was to elevate the voices and demands of Afghan women by providing a platform for dialogue with the UN Special Rapporteur. Additionally, the event aimed to raise awareness on four key themes outlined in the Call to Action.

### 4.3.1. KEY DISCUSSIONS:

- Participant Question: What is your opinion about recognizing intersectional issues affecting the safety and security of young Afghan women and developing more effective interventions?

Response: Richard Bennett emphasized the significance of intersectional issues, acknowledging their impact on increasing the vulnerability of Afghan women. He committed to including these factors in his upcoming report.

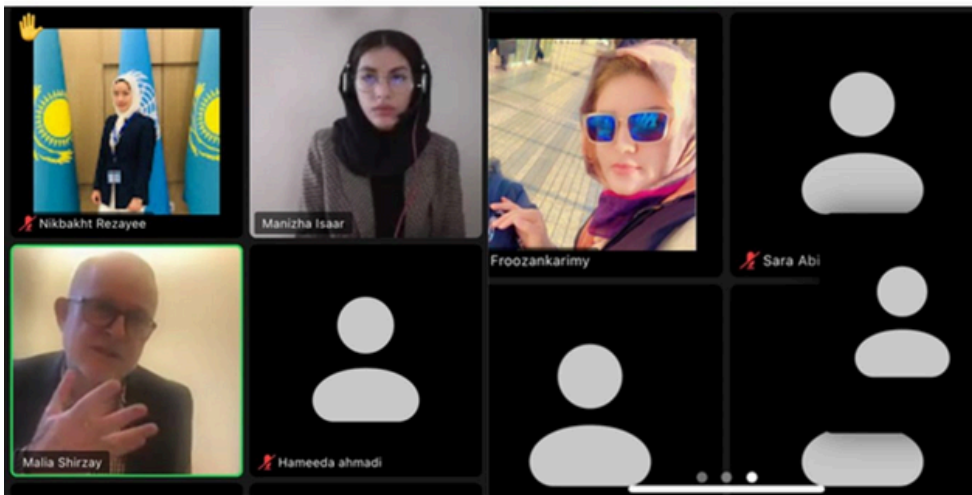
- Participant Question: How can collaborative efforts between Afghan NGOs, International Organizations, and host countries in Central Asia effectively address challenges faced by Afghan women pursuing education outside Afghanistan?

Response: Richard Bennett acknowledged the importance of collaborative efforts. While stating it's not within his mandate to directly facilitate collaborations, he pledged to advocate for Afghan women in Central Asian countries. He highlighted the significance of international conferences to garner support, especially for scholarships. The OI Peace Advocacy Dialogue fostered engaging discussions and highlighted the critical issues surrounding Afghan women's safety, education, and well-being. The commitment of stakeholders, including Richard Bennett, reflects a collective effort towards addressing these challenges and advocating for meaningful change.

Strengthening the Social Capital of Afghan Young Women for Advancing Peace in Afghanistan  
Peace Advocacy Dialogue

Date: 25.03.2024

Manizha Isaar	Rahila Sediqi	Richard Bennett	Nilofar Ayoubi	Maliha Shirzay
Manizha Isaar is a civil society activist and the board member of Bakhtar Institute. She is also running several vocational and educational centers for women in Kabul and Logar provinces of Afghanistan.	Ms. Rahila Sediqi is a women's rights activist with MA in Social Development from UK. She is currently Founder & Director of Rabela Trust for Afghan women's education and Founder & CEO of Omid International.	Mr. Richard Bennett is UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan. He has served in different capacities including as the Chief of the Human Rights Service with the UNAMA.	Ms. Nilofar Ayoubi is an activist, journalist, and entrepreneur. Currently, serving as the CEO of Asia Times Afghanistan and the Editor of Akhbar Al-Aam Afghanistan.	Ms. Maliha Shirzay is a research fellow at the KWI, collaborating with the UN Special Rapporteur on Afghanistan. Pursuing a third master's degree in international Migration and Ethnic Relations.



Online Europe Dialogue: Advocating for Peace and Empowerment

## 4.4. PEACE ADVOCACY AND AWARENESS SESSION IN ISLAMABAD, PAKISTAN

Omid International's workshop in Islamabad, Pakistan, held on the 31st of March 2024, marked a significant milestone in our ongoing efforts to raising peace advocacy for Afghan women towards peacebuilding and prosperity. With a focus on critical themes including peace, security, and impact of women in education and economic empowerment in peacebuilding process.

The event was facilitated by key moderators Roqia Rezaie, Lida Saidhkily, and Farahnaz Mahsheed, who provided invaluable guidance and unwavering support throughout. At the start of the program, Mrs. Rahela Sediqi illuminated the critical significance of young women's participation in the peacebuilding effort, emphasizing their indispensable role in forging a harmonious future for Afghanistan.

## 4.4. PEACE ADVOCACY AND AWARENESS SESSION IN ISLAMABAD, PAKISTAN

This event brought together 32 participants, including intellectual young Afghan women leaders, human rights activists, and peace promoters, to engage in constructive dialogue and strategic planning.

By addressing crucial issues and identifying actionable steps, we are one step closer to realizing our vision of a peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan.

In addition to our workshops core objectives, it's imperative to highlight our overarching aim of raising public awareness. Through informative sessions, interactive discussions, and strategic planning, we aimed to not only empower Afghan women but also to foster understanding and support from the broader public.



## 4.4.1. Key Highlights:

- Urged for legal and political frameworks to ensure women's inclusion in peace talks.
- Discussed criteria for selecting qualified women representatives, focusing on awareness, impartiality, and experience.
- Explored training approaches, such as conferences and capacity-building centers, to empower women in negotiations.
- Stressed the role of international organizations in promoting women's rights awareness.
- Advocated for women's participation in decision-making and support for violence survivors.
- Recommended training programs to enhance women's personal security awareness, leveraging social media and community initiatives.
- Discussed tailored general and peace education programs for Afghan women, emphasizing empowerment, educational choice, and financial aid.
- Suggested strategies for implementing education and peace education initiatives in rural areas, like small classes and community engagement.



We deeply appreciate all participants for their enthusiastic involvement and commitment to fostering constructive transformation.

## 5.4. Peace Advocacy and Awareness Session in Tehran, Iran



On April 15, 2024, Omid International hosted an enlightening regional dialogue in Tehran, Iran, focusing on empowering Afghan women to play pivotal roles in advancing peace efforts. Expertly managed by Nadeya Sediqi, the event witnessed the active participation of 25 bright young Afghan women.

During this impactful workshop, participants delved into actionable points addressing pressing demands and charting a course towards realizing women's rights in Afghanistan. Esteemed speakers, including Mrs. Nadeya Sediqi, Mrs. Sediqeh Sadat Hosseini, Mrs. Khatire Noorzai, and Mrs. Ramzieh Rezaei, passionately shared insights and engaged in fruitful discussions on various critical topics.

The dialogue yielded invaluable outcomes, fostering a collective sense of cooperation and solidarity, and a commitment to effecting meaningful change. Participants unanimously recognized the urgency of engaging with the Taliban and reframing women's political participation as integral to building a brighter future for Afghanistan.

### 4.5.1. Key Highlights:

- Urgency to eradicate gender discrimination, starting with challenging societal perceptions within families.
- Cease propagation of Taliban ideology through religious schools to promote women's rights.
- Address illiteracy among women and promote self-advocacy to combat patriarchy.
- Implement cultural and educational programs tailored for men to foster understanding and equality.
- Prioritize peace education as a cornerstone for societal advancement, gender equality, and women's active engagement in the peace and development process. Incorporate gender equality into Afghanistan's legal framework and political mechanisms.
- Establish safe working environments to empower women in various sectors, including peacebuilding.
- Utilize financial tools and marketing strategies to support women entrepreneurs.

The dialogue concluded on a hopeful note, with Mrs. Rahela Sidiqi's inspiring remarks resonating deeply with all attendees, leaving them uplifted and motivated.



## 4.6. Peace Advocacy and Awareness Session in Kabul, Afghanistan

On April 28, 2024, Omid International orchestrated a significant peace advocacy awareness program in Kabul, Afghanistan. This event, skillfully moderated by Aisha Qazi, OI's peace advocate and mentor in Afghanistan, featured other panelists: Farzana Mohammadi, Marzia Kosha Fakori, Khalida Saheb Zada, and Elham Kohistani. Together, they brought together 50 young women in a unified effort, actively contributing to shaping a narrative of peace and progress for women's engagement in the peace process.

This program originated from the vision of Mrs. Rahela Sediqi, who articulated the imperative of advocating for women, particularly those within Afghanistan, to foster enhanced peace and sustainable stability through peace education.

Participants explored key points of the peace enhancement process, which encapsulated pivotal areas poised to drive positive change in women's contribution to peace education.

### 4.6.1. Key Highlights:

- Opening doors to schools and universities for Afghan girls.
- Ensuring acceptance and provision of resources for online education.
- Establishing teams of Afghan girls to provide education door-to-door.
- Providing necessary materials such as computers, internet access, and tablets for online education.
- Selecting qualified women with high skills and experience to represent Afghan girls in peace talks.
- Ensuring the security of Afghan women engaged in peace education.
- Creating new job opportunities and providing financial support.
- Encouraging the establishment of small businesses and enhancing individual skills.
- Discussing the security concerns of Afghan women with the current government.
- Taking women's requests into consideration when formulating rules and policies.

At Omid International, by amplifying the voices and aspirations of Afghan women, we pave the path towards a brighter, more inclusive future. Through collaborative efforts and strategic dialogue, together, we turn aspirations into action.

## 4.7. Omid International Peace Education Mentoring Program With Rahela Trust Collaboration



Peer mentoring began through a collaboration between Rahela Trust, the Sister Agency of Omid International (OI), and participants of the OI conference. There are currently 18 peer mentoring WhatsApp groups, comprising 180 young women from various countries. Rahela Trust mentors coordinate and assess the interests of different groups of young women within our networks.

Once areas of interest are identified, Diaspora mentors develop customized curricula tailored to each group's preferences. Upon approval of the curriculum by the group, the Diaspora mentor discusses her availability and accommodates the time zones of the mentees. Classes are conducted on a bi-weekly basis, with each session lasting one hour, as per the needs and demands of the mentees.

### 4.7.1. Program Goals:

- To cultivate a deeper understanding of peace through comprehensive coursework spanning English language proficiency, international relations and management, human rights advocacy, leadership development, web designing, and fundamental marketing strategies and so on.
- To equip their skills necessary to seize professional opportunities both within and beyond Afghanistan's borders.

The mentoring sessions cover a range of topics including peace education, web design, business marketing, advanced English, primary English, human rights and peacebuilding, diplomacy, international relations and history, as well as management and peace education.



## 5. STORIES: INTEREST AND DEMAND

### Sakina Taban Fakuri, the Symbol of Light Amidst Darkness

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In the shadow of adversity, Sakina Taban Fakuri, a devoted psychologist, found herself among a group of civil activists in Daikundi Province. Under the guidance of mentor Mrs. Negina Yari, their 70-minute session posed a profound question:

"Do you find this session useful?"

Sakina's response resonated with hope:

"Yes, it is very useful and interesting for me. I deal with women every day, discussing their problems and ways to address them. I find it beneficial both mentally and physically. Despite the darkness and malfunctioning equipment, including the antenna and internet, I sit beneath the trees, eagerly participating in this meeting."

In her words, she discovered a glimmer of hope, cherishing the transformative power of connection and guidance.

### Nasrin Wafa: A Symbolic Flight on the Cliff's Edge, Like an Eagle of Knowledge

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I am Nasreen Wafa, residing in the Waras District of Bamyan Province, nestled amidst the rugged mountains—the farthest reaches of Bamyan's embrace.

Here, in our remote corner of the world, the internet connection flickers like a distant beacon. Yet, amid the challenges, my heart yearns for knowledge, particularly in subjects like RC Diplomacy. It is through the mentoring program offered by Omid International, led by the inspiring Ms. Parwana Paikan, that I find inner peace.

I join the online class from atop the mountain. I seek empowerment through these online lessons. Despite the obstacles posed by weak connectivity, each pixelated image on my screen becomes a testament to my unwavering determination to learn and grow.

### Shukria Sultani's Journey with Mentorship and Knowledge

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In Afghanistan where internet poor quality threatened to hold back my learning, I found myself under the guidance of the amazing mentor, Manizha Isar. Despite the technical issues, her teachings were crystal clear and fascinating.

I learned about important topics like peace, conflict, and human rights. Even my hopeless mind, couldn't stop me from discovering the wealth of knowledge Manizha had to offer.

The program was not just about learning from Manizha but also about making friends with other girls who shared my interests and passions.

We became a tight-knit group, eager to soak up everything the program had to offer. Realizing how much I had gained from the program,

I knew I had to ensure that others could experience the same. That's why I advocated for continuing the training so that more girls like me could benefit from the amazing program I had created.

# 5. STORIES: INTEREST AND DEMAND

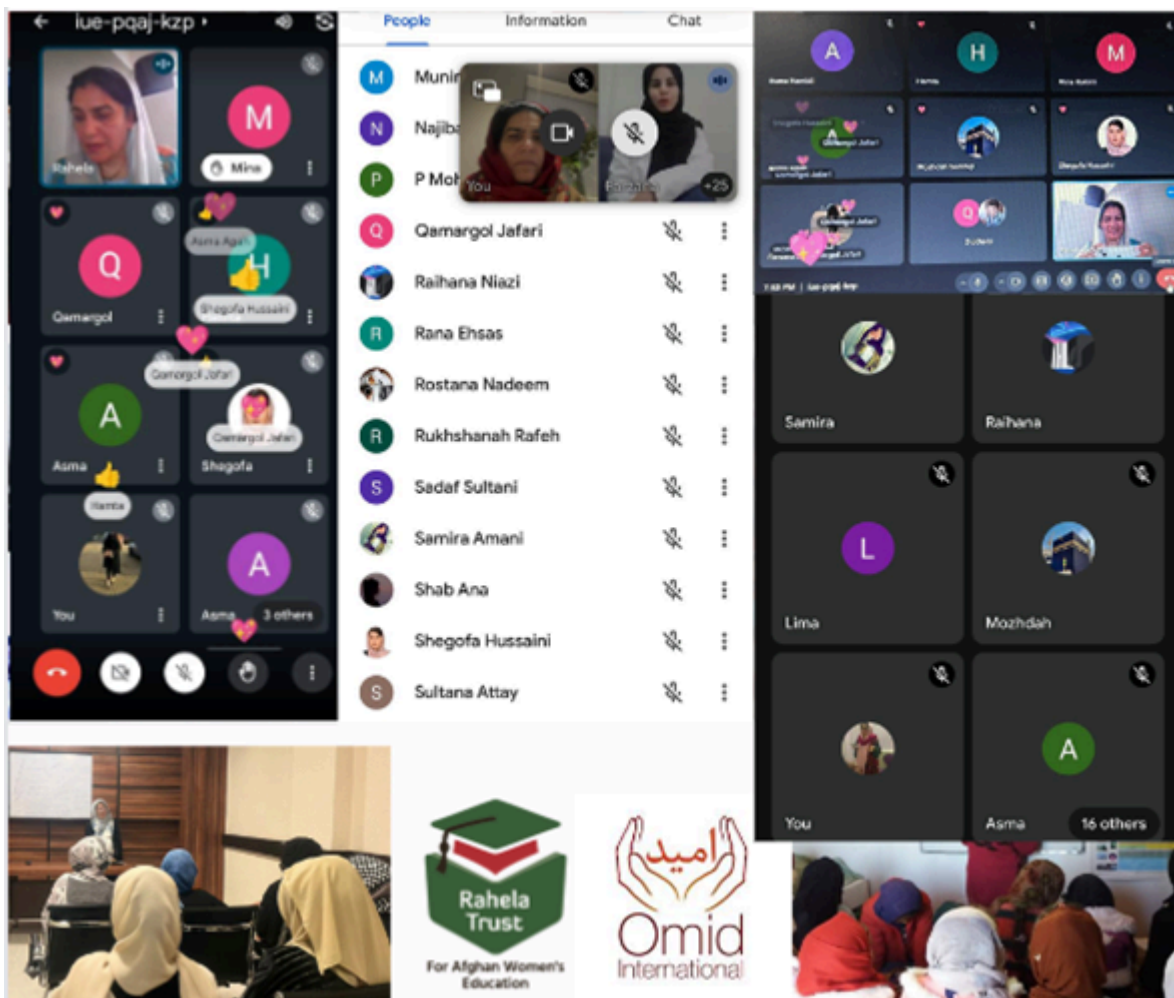
## Shafiq Naqi Khil's Quest of the Scholarly Bee: In Pursuit of the finding honey of knowledge

I am Shafiq Naqi Khil. All the lessons were interesting to me because all the subjects were new to me, even though the Internet does not work properly in all the rooms. There is an unfinished kitchen in our house where the internet connection is better. There is no electricity there; I was studying all my lessons there.

All the lessons of the project were useful for me and related to my field such as the project and project types, conflict and its solution, human rights, and its importance, and how to prepare proposals. In this situation, it was useful for me to arrange a business or project proposal.

Continuing this project is crucial because every woman deserves the chance to learn and grow. I know firsthand how valuable it is. Without the lessons on proposal writing and human rights, I wouldn't have the confidence to speak up or advocate for women's rights. It's about more than just me; it's about uplifting all women in society.

Trauma release, fostering natural collaboration, and building solidarity among young Afghan women in Afghanistan and Diaspora young women. Provision of joint efforts and team responsibility. Creation of a sense of hope, responsibility, and commitment toward their skills building and working with the community.



## **6. INTERNATIONAL AFGHAN PEACE ADVOCACY WORKSHOP IN ISTANBUL, TURKEY**

The August 2023 Peace Advocacy Workshop is scheduled to run from August 11th to 14th.

The workshop brought together 24 participants from Europe, the CIS, the Middle East, Turkey, and Afghanistan, as well as 11 International Resource Persons (representing the UN, CSOs, media, academia in Asia, Europe, and America), who offered diverse expertise in peacebuilding, conflict resolution, human rights, and gender equality. The hybrid model of the workshop encouraged both offline and online participation.

The structure of the workshop allowed participants to prioritize critical issues for peace advocacy, prepare advocacy strategies, utilize effective tools, and develop action plans for implementation. This included brainstorming sessions, small group mentoring sessions, interactions with peace practitioners and expert speakers, and processes for solidifying a network of peace advocates.

The objective was to prepare and mentor core young Afghan advocate leaders in participatory planning of peace advocacy initiatives aimed at increasing the participation of young women in peace deals and fostering the socio-economic development of Afghanistan.

## **7. RESEARCHERS OF DUSHANBE CONFERENCE**

The OI Rapid Response Proposal has been approved by the UN-WPHF (Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund). Subsequently, OI developed the four themes of the conference in consultation with identified participants. The agenda of the conference was formulated in collaboration with the participants, and topics for each theme were provided by 13 highly intellectual participants from across the EU.

### **The conference covered the following topics:**

- 1: Introductory Session
- 2: Human Rights
- 3: Afghan Women Challenges
- 4: Peace Building
- 5: Understanding Informed and Evidence-Based Peace Advocacy
- 6: Effective Peace Advocacy Strategies, Steps, and Tools
- 7: Advocacy with Decision Makers
- 8: Prioritization of the Afghan Women Challenges for Developing Advocacy Strategy
- 9: Drafting Advocacy Strategy
- 10: Solidarity and Networking

Each researcher's papers were discussed during the conference, and they also responded to questions from the participants.

## **8. Harmony in Action: Empowering Voices for Peace - Insights from Dushanbe Conference Participants**

The Dushanbe Conference on "Strengthening Social Capital of Young Afghan Women for Advancing Peace" convened a diverse group of activists, scholars, and advocates dedicated to women's rights and peacebuilding in Afghanistan. Here is the invaluable feedback provided by esteemed participants, shedding light on their experiences, insights, and recommendations gleaned from the conference discussions. From reflections on the conference's unique features to actionable suggestions for future initiatives, their voices resonate with determination, resilience, and a collective commitment to empowering Afghan women and fostering sustainable peace.

## ***Mina Gul Ghiasi Women Rights Activist in Tajikistan***

The conference was unique because it was managed by women, which shows that Afghan women are capable of being leaders and leading such important conferences. I learned many new things from the conference, which added to my knowledge and experience. I found that the Afghan women diaspora is standing up for the rights of women in Afghanistan wherever they are, and this gives more hope to me and thousands of deprived women who are in Afghanistan and suffering from the worsened situation currently present in Afghanistan. The discussions highlighted the role of Afghan women in peacebuilding and their participation in the political, social, and economic affairs of Afghanistan, to be considered by the international community and those countries involved in Afghanistan's affairs and the United Nations.

The difference of this conference from others, which are happening continuously on the Afghanistan issue, was that it was entirely managed by women. It was well-established, with the selection of important topics and presenters, and it included young Afghan women who represent the future of Afghanistan—a consideration often overlooked in other conferences.

All four parts of the conference were very important and inspiring. For me, the experiences shared by other women politicians who started from grassroots and reached their goals were particularly impressive and motivating. It inspired me to strive harder to reach my own goals. These kinds of experience sharing sessions are very important for young women to understand the challenges they may face and how to turn those challenges into opportunities.

The team of Omid International and its counterparts played very well in their roles, and all aspects were managed properly with the necessary requirements available at all times. I believe they did everything necessary to manage the program effectively. Their organizational behavior was of international standard. Thanks to Omid and its team.

1. Any suggestions for making future conferences even better?

The suggestions I have are:

- To continue hosting this conference annually in Central Asian countries with increased participation.
- To expand the number of participant members in the future.
- To invite more experienced and internationally recognized Afghan women, as well as women from around the world, to share their experiences at the conference.
- To organize site visits to institutions in the host countries that are led by women, providing participants with practical experiences and insights.

## **Maliha Shirzay, Women's rights activist, Researcher at RWI institute**

The conference provided valuable insights and perspectives on the empowerment of Afghan women and the complexities surrounding gender dynamics in Afghanistan. Reflecting on the discussions and presentations, I found several noteworthy points that significantly contributed to my understanding of the topic.

One of the most compelling ideas presented during the conference was the innate resilience and agency demonstrated by Afghan women in asserting their rights and advocating for their rights toward gender equality. The discussions underscored the importance of recognizing and amplifying the voices of women in shaping policies and initiatives aimed at promoting gender empowerment.

Furthermore, the discourse surrounding women's empowerment offered a fascinating juxtaposition of perspectives from female and male participants. It was intriguing to observe the nuanced differences in how women perceive and articulate their empowerment compared to their male counterparts. This contrast provided valuable insights into the gendered nature of empowerment narratives and highlighted the need for inclusive dialogue that acknowledges diverse experiences.

Additionally, the emphasis on the role of women in political discussions, particularly in the context of Afghanistan, was a significant takeaway from the conference. The recognition of women as active participants in decision-making processes is essential for fostering inclusive governance and addressing the unique challenges faced by Afghan society.

Moreover, the choice of venue for the conference, Tajikistan's capital Dushanbe, provided a rich cultural backdrop that enhanced the discussions on Afghan women's empowerment. The cultural connectivity between Tajikistan and Afghanistan offered valuable insights into the shared heritage and traditions that shape gender dynamics in the region.

Overall, the conference was an enriching experience that deepened my understanding of Afghan women's empowerment and underscored the importance of gender-inclusive approaches in promoting social change. Also, the event deepened inclusive approaches in peace-building efforts. I look forward to continuing the dialogue and exploring further insights from the discussions.

The part of the conference that I found particularly impressive was the discussion on women's empowerment and education, which intersected in profound ways. It shed light on the crucial role of women in political decision-making processes related to peace-building and conflict resolution in Afghanistan. The emphasis on empowering women to actively participate in such discussions was not only insightful but also inspiring. It underscored the importance of promoting gender equality and inclusivity in all aspects of society, especially in contexts of conflict and post-conflict reconstruction.

Overall, I believe the team behaved admirably and managed the conference effectively. The event was well-organized, and everyone remained engaged throughout. However, one suggestion I have is to invite a more diverse group of participants from Tajikistan, particularly women representing different sectors. This would enrich the discussion on women's empowerment and ensure a broader understanding of the issues at hand, as we can better comprehend each other's perspectives when speaking the same language.

Certainly, for future conferences, it would be beneficial to expand the pool of invitees to ensure a diverse range of perspectives and expertise. Additionally, incorporating elements of cultural enrichment, such as offering Afghan music performed by local Afghan musicians in case they are there, could enhance the overall experience for participants. This would not only provide a moment of delight but also offer Afghan attendees a connection to their cultural heritage, which may be missed when attending events in other countries.

## **Raihana Ahmadi, Education Advocate in Tajikistan**

The conference provided a wealth of information from the perspectives of Afghan women and facilitated meaningful communication among women working in different areas to support Afghan women. Among the most valuable lessons learned is how Afghan women empower themselves using resources and tools within their reach. For example:

1. Access to online courses in various subjects for women who are unable to attend school or participate in social activities.
2. Creation of job opportunities such as handicrafts to help women address economic challenges.
3. Women uniting to amplify their voices and advocate for gender equality, ensuring that the voices of Afghan women are heard by the Taliban and the rest of the world.

The most inspiring aspect of the conference was witnessing the determination and resilience of Afghan women still in Afghanistan, continuing their activism despite formidable challenges. Their unwavering commitment to fighting for rights in a challenging environment dominated by various gender-related parties reaffirmed my belief in Afghan women's perseverance for equality and justice.

Another standout moment was engaging in discussions about peace in Afghanistan with individuals from diverse backgrounds. This marked the first time representatives from all Afghan ethnic groups gathered to discuss shared challenges within the country, alongside Afghan women from abroad. This inclusive dialogue showcased a significant societal shift, illustrating active advocacy for peace and rights among women over the past two decades.

Looking ahead, future conferences could benefit from inviting more women with expertise in legal organizations from various countries, Afghan and foreign alike. Their insights into Afghan women's issues and strategies for overcoming oppressive Taliban policies would be invaluable. Additionally, Afghan women abroad should present new plans to support those within Afghanistan, emphasizing the importance of practical steps alongside dialogue for meaningful change.

## **Manizha Isaar, Human Rights Advocate**

The conference was impeccably structured and action-oriented, leaving a profound impact on all attendees. What truly resonated with me was the inclusive platform provided, particularly for the voices of Kabul's women to be heard loud and clear. It was inspiring to see delegates from international organizations present, actively listening to these voices and carrying them forward to international negotiations.

The focus on tangible outcomes and actionable steps was commendable. I am hopeful that the demands voiced on behalf of Afghans will receive the attention and response they rightfully deserve.

## **Nikbakht Rezayee, Student at Al Farabi Kazakh National University, Delegate from Kazakhstan**

Participating in the conference "Strengthening Social Capital of Young Afghan Women for Advancing Peace in Dushanbe, Tajikistan," proved to be an invaluable experience, laden with profound and instructive lessons. It allowed me to engage with esteemed national and international figures, individuals possessing extensive educational backgrounds, and decades of experience dedicated to societal betterment, particularly in empowering women amidst prevailing challenges. This served as a powerful motivator, especially in these trying circumstances for the women and girls of my country, as we collectively demonstrated our strength, harmonized voices, and steadfast emphasis on the right to demand justice through active participation in this conference.

What set this conference apart for me was the genuine respect and consideration given to the opinions, suggestions, and criticisms of every participant. It provided a platform where individuals felt neither alienated nor inhibited, fostering an environment where open dialogue flourished. The overall atmosphere was characterized by mutual friendliness, allowing participants to freely express their thoughts.

In my role within the program, I proudly represented my country, articulating its challenges and dilemmas. This platform granted us the opportunity to direct pertinent questions to those in positions of influence and articulate potential solutions to a global audience.

Throughout the conference, the cohesion and excellence displayed by all members of Mrs. Rahela Sediqi's team, as well as other esteemed program organizers, were truly commendable. The unity and coherence among us facilitated the effective transmission of our collective voice to the global community, an achievement made possible with your invaluable support.

Looking ahead, my suggestion to enhance the future endeavors of this organization involves a concentrated effort on the implementation of proposed plans and programs. While formulating theories and proposals is undoubtedly crucial, the true challenge lies in executing them. Omid International must channel its focus towards fostering stronger unity and relationships among its members. This strategic approach will enable us to collectively progress toward shared objectives, leveraging our existing relationships and knowledge as collaborative partners in pursuit of a stable, common goal.

## **Mursal Sepahizada, Social Activist, Delegate from Kyrgyzstan**

First and foremost, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to all the organizers, panelists, and participants of this landmark conference. Attending this international gathering focused on Afghan women has been an immensely enriching experience for me. It served as a platform where I, along with fellow attendees, gained invaluable insights from the experiences of highly accomplished women dedicated to advancing women's participation in governance and fostering peace in Afghanistan.

Reflecting on the proceedings, I have distilled some personal takeaways that resonate deeply with me. One resounding lesson is the realization that irrespective of my current circumstances or position, I possess the agency to effect meaningful change. The conference effectively underscored the idea that individual actions, driven by conviction and capability, can significantly impact the prevailing situation. On a more scholarly note, the conference broadened my understanding of the inherent resilience demonstrated by Afghan women in their relentless pursuit of gender equality.

The discussions illuminated the pivotal role of amplifying women's voices in shaping policies and initiatives geared towards gender empowerment. Recognizing women as active contributors to decision-making processes is not just desirable but imperative for nurturing inclusive governance and addressing the myriad challenges confronting Afghan society. The conference served as a powerful catalyst for reinforcing the belief that even in the face of governmental constraints, it is incumbent upon us to raise our voices collectively and empower one another. It instilled in me a newfound sense of purpose and agency, dispelling the notion that individual efforts are inconsequential. Instead, it emphasized the transformative potential of collective action in driving positive change. In essence, the conference has profoundly altered my perspective. It has transitioned me from viewing myself as a solitary individual with limited influence to recognizing the ripple effect I can catalyze, inspiring and empowering countless other women within my sphere of influence.

This conference, organized by and for Afghan women, centered on their pivotal role in fostering peace in Afghanistan. It emphasized the power and potential of women as integral members of society. With an international audience, the conference offered a fresh and inspiring perspective, highlighting capacity building and the formation of a unified community of young, proactive Afghan women committed to peacebuilding. Unlike typical conferences, the focus extended beyond the event itself. Participants were encouraged to take action post-conference, working collectively towards peace and supporting women both within and outside Afghanistan. The overarching aim was to create a cohesive network dedicated to effecting positive change and empowering women on a global scale.

I thoroughly enjoyed every aspect of the conference, but the group discussions stood out as particularly impactful and inspiring. These sessions divided women into four focus areas, where we brainstormed actionable strategies for driving change. I was part of the education group, and I was deeply impressed by the creativity and practicality of the ideas generated. Alongside other talented Afghan women, we discussed innovative approaches to supporting education for women in Afghanistan and beyond. Recognizing education as a crucial catalyst for peace, we explored ways to empower women through learning opportunities. Moreover, I found the panel discussions led by successful and educated women to be incredibly enriching. Their insights and ideas sparked thought-provoking conversations about tangible steps toward positive change. It was inspiring to witness the collective expertise and passion in the room, driving discussions on how to overcome challenges and promote women's rights effectively.

The success of the conference can be attributed to the dedication and contributions of both the organizing team and the participants. Witnessing the collective effort of educated and motivated women striving for change and peace, while supporting one another, was truly inspiring. Despite language barriers, participants remained actively engaged and determined to contribute, showcasing admirable resilience. The conference highlighted the unwavering spirit of women from diverse backgrounds coming together to share insights and work towards common goals of empowerment and peace, underscoring the strength of collaboration.

Overall, I found the conference to be highly productive, educational, and of excellent quality. However, I do have a few suggestions that I believe could enhance future conferences. Firstly, given that the “Call for Action” plan was a key outcome of the conference, I feel that the group discussions for each theme were somewhat brief. Allowing more time for these discussions would enable teams to brainstorm more thoroughly and develop more robust action plans.



## **Parwana Paikan , Minister Counsellor of Afghanistan Embassy in France**

The conference left a lasting impression with its focus on empowering Afghan young women as pivotal agents of change in the forthcoming peace-building endeavors in Afghanistan. The varied perspectives shared by speakers and participants deepened my understanding, highlighting the critical need for a vibrant generation of both young men and women to actively engage in the nation's state-building efforts more than ever before.

In the wake of Afghanistan's fall in August 2021, this conference emerged as a pioneer in its dedicated focus on empowering Afghan young women, both within the nation and beyond its borders. Set apart from typical gatherings, this event prioritized pragmatic discussions concerning the future peace-building endeavors in Afghanistan, with a particular emphasis on nurturing the leadership potential of young women poised to shape tomorrow's landscape.

The interactive thematic group discussions, where participants and speakers collaboratively crafted key action points for the call to action based on each theme, stood out as particularly captivating and valuable. This approach not only fostered meaningful engagement but also facilitated the generation of actionable insights that could drive tangible progress in the targeted areas.

The team's professionalism was truly exceptional, and their support was exemplary. Their dedication and expertise greatly contributed to the success of the endeavor.

To ensure the longevity of our efforts and achieve sustainable outcomes, I propose organizing follow-up meetings among the speakers to actively execute the outlined 'Call for Action.' Furthermore, it is crucial to capitalize on the momentum generated by this conference by using it as a springboard for future events that delve deeper into the actionable steps identified during our discussions. By establishing a series of successive conferences, we can foster ongoing dialogue, facilitating a continuous exchange of ideas and enhancing the practical implementation of initiatives set forth in our inaugural gathering.

## **Nadeya Sediqi (Ph.D. student at Kharazmi University, University lecturer - Participant from Iran**

Without a doubt, I feel immensely privileged to have participated in this comprehensive and expansive conference. What particularly intrigued me were the proposals and initiatives presented regarding economic, educational, and practical solutions to achieve objectives such as women's participation in the peace process, their role in Afghanistan's economic growth, and the mental health and well-being of women.

I express my heartfelt gratitude to Mrs. Rahela Sediqi and her team, who played a crucial role in the effective organization and coordination of this gathering, demonstrating unwavering dedication.

In conclusion, I hope that these sessions continue and that necessary financial and moral support is consistently provided for the implementation of the proposed plans.

## **Post Conference Dialogues**

Following the conclusion of the conference, post-conference dialogues were initiated to delve deeper into the topics discussed and foster continued collaboration among participants. This section outlines the strategic responsibilities and action plans proposed by various stakeholders to advance the goals of the conference and ensure sustained progress in empowering Afghan women and fostering peace. From donor commitments to Omid International's coordination efforts and participant engagement strategies, each entity plays a crucial role in driving forward the initiatives outlined in the "Next Step Strategy." Let's delve into the detailed strategies and responsibilities outlined by each stakeholder for the advancement of these critical objectives.

### **Next Step Strategy**

#### **Donor Responsibility:**

- Financial and logistical support
- Capacity-building programs
- Support the synergy mobilization
- Support it as a long-term and sustainable program

#### **Strategies:**

- Strategic fund allocation
- Focused and tailored approach
- Continuous engagement with participants and OI
- Monitor and evaluate

#### **Omid International Responsibility:**

- Lead the coordination and implementation of
- Post-conference initiatives.
- Maintain engagement with stakeholders
- Continue Organic approach to the project activities

#### **Strategies:**

- Develop a comprehensive organic action plan
- Host regular follow-up meetings and policy briefings
- Strengthen partnerships with organization
- Continuous monitoring and improvement of programs and evaluate

## Participants Responsibility:

- Actively engage in initiatives
- Apply learned skills
- Share knowledge and experiences
- Strategies:
  - Form local groups
  - Use digital platforms
  - Engage in continuous learning and capacity-building

## International stakeholders NGO government responsibility

- Support the initiatives
- Use their influence
- Focus on track 2
- Engage with civil society

## Strategies

- Implement policy changes
- Provide technical assistance and capacity building
- Promote and facilitate international dialogues
- Use the 'call for action

**Thank You**

