

Brussels Conference on Afghanistan: are we still funding warlords?

On 4 and 5 October 2016, the European Union and the government of Afghanistan will co-host the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan. This conference will gather up to 70 countries and 30 international organisations and agencies. Following the London Conference on Afghanistan in 2014 and the Tokyo Conference in 2012, the Brussels Conference, which is run in partnership with the international community, is expected to focus on the 'significant progress achieved by the Afghan people in a wide range of areas over the past 14 years.'

Yet recent figures reveal a different scenario, which is far from positive.

Afghanistan is still a war country occupied by foreign powers, with nine US/NATO permanent military bases, built with the Afghan government's approval. United Nations reports show that, since the beginning of the conflict, 111,442 civilians have died while 116,603 have been injured. The ongoing clashes among local Taliban militias or the 'collateral damages' of Western airstrikes are not the sole causes behind these dramatic figures. Infact, a series of suicide attacks (Isil-K) carried out by Daesh, whose presence in the country has been officially confirmed by the US last year, as well as bloody fighting among Afghan warlords are also to blame.

UNHCR figures show that since 1978 (which marks the beginning of the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan) the number of people fleeing this war-torn country has dramatically risen. **Today, Afghanistan remains the second-largest source country for refugees after Syria.**

Regarding human rights, in 2014, the **UNDP Human Development Index (HDI) - a composite statistic of key indicators of human development - positioned Afghanistan at 171 out of 188 countries and territories with the lowest human development index.** The broken promises of the Afghan president Ghani, with regards to health, education and employment remain a demagogic instrument.

The latest report by UNIFEM reveals that the Afghan Ministry of Women's Affairs alone registered more than 4,000 cases of violence against women in the first nine months of 2015. Yet these figures, as confirmed by the agency itself are nonetheless inaccurate due to insecurity, lack of a functioning government or judiciary, and traditional practices, which combined to discourage victims and their families from reporting violence.

The Afghanistan's National Action Plan (NAP) on Women, Peace and Security was due to be further developed by the end of 2015 with a specific action plan and put into effect in the first half of 2016, yet to date these resolutions have not been effectively implemented.

In light of these facts, the current situation of the country requires aid donors to re-consider the way the International community has so far invested its financial resources in Afghanistan.

In the last 14 years, thousands of billions of dollars have been spent, yet it is estimated that 90% of these resources have been used to fund the military intervention in Afghanistan, while only 10% has been allocated to development cooperation projects.

It is now clear that the request appeal that advanced during the Tokyo Conference in 2012 to allocate at least 30 per cent of financial aid to programmes of civil cooperation has failed to be

addressed. Measures to combat the rampant corruption within the Afghanistan government which stunted the allocation of financial aid, have similarly been neglected.

During the recent NATO summit in Warsaw, which took place in July 2016, NATO members agreed to help fund Afghan security forces to the tune of 4.5 billion dollars annually over the next three years. Once again, Italy committed to join its allies in the reconstruction process.

In light of this commitment we appeal to our MPs and the EU to follow closely the upcoming meeting in Brussels.

By itself, Afghanistan provides 85% of the estimated global heroin and morphine supply. According to Transparency International, Afghanistan is one of the most corrupted countries in the world and it is now plunging into a devastating political crisis which indisputably proves the failure of the International community's transition plan.

Additional financial aid cannot be allocated without strict conditional measures to combat fraud and corruption in Afghanistan.

For all these reasons, we call for the Italian government and all the EU member states to:

- Establish a new Independent Commission comprising of members of civil society, academics, members of government and international experts to strictly monitor and evaluate specific projects and national programmes funded with the next allocated financial aid.
- Immediately withdraw any financial aid and use required legal measures, whenever suspicions over the correct use and management of the allocated funds arise.
- Support and include democratic forces and the Afghan civil society in the design and implementation process of development projects and their foreign donors.
- Increase the percentage of resources allocated to civil cooperation programmes and humanitarian assistance in line with National Laws and International Conventions ratified in defence of Universal Human Rights.
- Release accurate and timely reports on every action taken pertaining agreed projects and programmes to comply with transparency and accountability.

It is sadly known that in Afghanistan, many people accused by independent agencies such as Human Rights Watch or Amnesty International of committing war crimes are now working within the government. As long as support to corrupted MPs and government workers is provided, the reconstruction of a democratic and peaceful country which the international community is committed to promote, cannot be achieved.

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