

Afghanistan Young Leaders Initiative

Position Paper to the Tokyo Conference on Afghanistan

Kabul – July 02, 2012

Preamble

The Tokyo Conference on Afghanistan intends to secure the international community's long-term political and financial support for the remainder of the Transition period (end 2014) and throughout the Transformation Decade, 2015 - 2025. The outline of this conference is led by yet another strategy paper aimed at achieving Afghanistan self-reliance by the year 2025. The paper is based on a mutual accountability and good governance framework – a vision widely viewed as doubtful at best in the eyes of common Afghans.

While the Afghan public can only hope that the Tokyo Conference can bring a positive change to their lives and to sustain their livelihoods, only time will prove if it is not just another waste of time and resources.

The Afghan Young Leaders Initiative (AYLI) would like to echo the voices of the common men, the poor, who are deprived of many or all social services, and of those entrepreneurs, who assume great-risks in initiating new businesses, that it is time for the Afghan government as well as the international community to put their act together and use this opportunity and pin down some real measures to strengthen the mechanisms, institutions, and infrastructure for the sustainable development of the country during and beyond transition and the transformation period.

Concerns and Recommendations

We believe that the economic well-being of the masses will determine the success of Afghanistan and its partners for the years to come. Since 2002, the Government has prepared six development strategies, but a disconnect between policies, planning, and their translation into actions still persists. Any new plan for the long-term period must be public-oriented, and reflect the true needs and aspirations of the Afghan people, therefore the Tokyo Conference must be able to tell the normal Afghans how this conference is different from its predecessors.

On the other hand, the Government and International Community have not been entirely accountable during the last ten years through a mainstream monitoring mechanism. A number of monitoring boards and organizations have either been government or donor driven, and they have not always taken into account the genuine interests of the people. This has led to fragmented planning and implementation of projects across the country, with no or only minimal means of accountability to the people. In the meantime, these monitoring efforts should also convince both the Afghan government as well as the international community that their long-term engagement and commitment are built upon concrete and tangible deliverables.

The Afghan Young Leaders Initiative presents the following recommendations to the participants of the Tokyo Conference:

1. With the completion of the 2014 Transition process in sight, the Government's self-reliance roadmap should focus on the realities of government capacities for spending and proper management of projects and the international community's disbursement of financial commitments. The government's economic transition plan cannot be achieved if those realities are not met and mutually agreed upon at the Tokyo Conference.
2. We believe that the key economic drivers of Afghanistan lay within the country's abundant agriculture, natural resources, water management, mining, trade and transport opportunities; therefore, there should be a specific focus to revive these sectors economic vitality in order to guarantee the country's sustainable development.
3. The Government self-reliance roadmap should provide clear investment opportunities by providing a consistent and adaptive enabling environment for local and foreign investors that should be built on the experience of the past decade.
4. While a coherent plan for implementation is not visible within the Afghan government's documents, for effective results, Afghans should not remain the victim of a duplication of efforts; moreover, the

government should eliminate parallel structures within the existing government structure as well as aid delivery institutions.

5. Building upon a cohesive planning process by government, donors should provide long-term funding commitments, soft conditionality, and adhere to strictly a practical aid management policy.
6. Aid does not cause development; therefore, the government should build the necessary infrastructure and institutions during the Transformation Decade in order to align itself to long-term and concessional loans.
7. Delivery of services at the sub-national level in a balanced and prioritized way, to boost confidence building and peace-building process, must find itself on top priority of government, with donors directly contributing to it.
8. To tackle growing corruption, specific measures and benchmarks should be laid out both for government and the international community to undertake; that would not necessarily create additional institutions and mechanisms as has been witnessed, but to make the current institutions and mechanisms work better with the support of a strong political will.
9. It must be noted that ignoring regional political and security factors would adversely affect our economic relations in the region and lower our potentials of economic benefits. Any disconnect with regional partners has the potential of generating an imbalance in our regional diplomatic relations, with which our nation's security and stability are so intricately connected. Therefore, attaining a comprehensive approach towards improving the country's regional economic cooperation is of immense importance.
10. Afghanistan's rapid population growth rate of 2.8% and demographic pressures are issues of concern, especially in light of existing security and socio-economic challenges. A national census is non-existent and the population is estimated to increase to 82 million by 2050. A long-term strategy to balance population vs. sustainable socio-economic growth is required today.
11. Afghanistan has seen various large-scale international conferences, which produced ambitious visions on paper yet rarely followed-up in practice. We strongly suggest that a proper follow-up mechanism be established to ensure the promises delivered upon from both the Afghan Government and its international development partners.
12. The Government of Afghanistan should identify a unified and formal process of planning that is visionary, results-oriented, evidence-based, and practical in response to the needs and capacities of the country. We would like to reiterate the establishment of an Economic Planning Commission as a national overarching policy and planning institution that would not be ministry-driven. The Commission should enable the government to provide leadership of the planning process and to take ownership of all planning efforts. The Economic Planning Commission should serve as a policy and strategic think-tank for the President and his or her cabinet.

Conclusion

The Tokyo Conference provides yet another vital opportunity for the Afghan government to present itself responsibly and strategically prepared for the Transformation Decade. It also gives the international community another significant opportunity to prove that they are here to help the Afghan people through a long-term commitment. Therefore the mutual commitments forged in Tokyo and their subsequent delivery will provide the Afghan public with the basis to maintain faith in the current Kabul Process; otherwise, it will serve as another failed attempt and will prove that conferences and strategies equates automatically with no real action on the ground.

Afghanistan Young Leaders Initiative is a non-partisan and non-political group of young Afghans who share common values and beliefs to address social, economic and political issues in Afghanistan. Our aim is to mobilize the youth for taking part in critical nation-building initiatives and advocate for positive change in building a secure, safe and equitable Afghan society. Afghanistan Young Leaders Initiative established in 2011 in cooperation of Asia Society 21 Young Leaders program.

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