

ORGANIZATION FOR POLICY RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

‘Interact with a Policy Maker’ Sessions

Session 2: Thursday, February 21, 2019

Discussion with H.E. Ambassador Huseyin Avni Botsali,
Permanent Representative of the OIC in Afghanistan

Note:

This is a transcription of the second session of DROPS ‘Interact with a Policy Maker’ held at DROPS on Thursday, February 21, 2019 with H.E. Ambassador Huseyin Avni Botsali, Permanent Representative of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in Afghanistan.

‘Interact with a Policy Maker’ sessions are part of DROPS 7-Month Policy Study Workshop offered annually by DROPS. The workshop has been offered regularly since 2014.

Participants of this workshop are representatives of the Afghan government, local NGOs, academia, private sector, and media. In addition to the theoretical and conceptual trainings provided in these workshops on the basics of research, public policy, policy study and analysis, and decision-making models, the workshop also includes a practical element: the joint development of a Policy Brief or Policy Study by the workshop trainees on a timely policy topic that is published and widely circulated by DROPS.



DROPS

Organizatoin for Policy Research and Development Studies (DROPS)

The Organization for Policy Research and Development Studies (DROPS) has been working to strengthen democratic ideas and values by conducting research that provide policy-makers with sounds solutions to national issues. Research, capacity building, and advocacy are the three pillars of DROPS activities.

To empower women and enable their political participation, DROPS created the ‘Women and Public Policy Journal’ (WPPJ) that enables women to use the medium of in-depth policy research to influence decision-making on national issues. WPPJ is also a unique platform for women to articulate their concerns regarding national issues, learn research skills, critical thinking and publish peer-reviewed journal papers that are disseminated to national, regional and international policymakers.

Opening of discussion by Mariam Safi, DROPS Executive Director:

Good afternoon everyone. We are extremely honored and privileged today to have with us, H.E. Ambassador Huseyin Avni Botsali, Permanent Representative of the OIC in Afghanistan, to engage with us in a very friendly and informal environment.

Ambassador Huseyin Avni Botsali is currently working as Permanent Representative of the OIC in Afghanistan. He is an experienced Diplomat with decades of background working for Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Previously, H.E. has served as Vice President of Turkish National Commission for UNESCO, Advisor to the Turkish MoFA, Turkey's Ambassador to Cairo, Consul General in Mosul-Iraq, and Komotini-Greece, Counselor at Turkish Embassy in Washington D.C. and several other assignments. Now, we have him here in Afghanistan, which is not his first posting and neither is it his first time here—Ambassador Botsali has been engaged with Afghanistan since late eighties and early nineties. So, he has seen the various phases of the conflict, peace agreements, post-Bonn history, and now.

As to our training session, this is the new 2019 cohort and we have 20 participants in this cohort. We will kindly ask Ambassador Botsali a few questions to kick start our discussion and then we will open the floor for questions.

1st Question: From your perspective as a member of the diplomatic community in Afghanistan, how is policy research and/or policy study important for members of the international community?

Ambassador Botsali:

Well, thank you for the question. I am very pleased to meet with you. Thank you for inviting me, and thank you all for participating in this session.

First of all, let me tell you that I am not the kind of person who thinks that he is the one who knows everything and can create miracles to resolve the Afghan problem.

Second, I don't claim to know the issues of Afghanistan better than the Afghans. I am from Turkey originally, and I was here first time between 1988 and 1993 during the second part of the Soviet withdrawal and afterwards. Afghanistan was my second assignment abroad after Portugal.

In 1989, when the last Soviet soldier left Afghanistan, I ultimately became the last NATO diplomat who remained in Afghanistan, because all western embassies had closed down and evacuated their diplomats in view of the scenarios of state failure, regime collapse and bloodshed. Turkish government, out of solidarity with the people of Afghanistan, decided to make an exception and we chose not to not evacuate our embassy. It was not a forced decision. We all volunteered to stay.

At the end of my assignment after completing three years in Kabul, I was invited to the United Nations to join the political team of the UN Secretary General in Peshawar, Islamabad and Kabul. So, I became a political officer at UN Secretary General in Afghanistan and Pakistan, reporting directly to the UN Special Envoy. Now, the Special Envoy is Mr. Yamamoto and he lives in Kabul, but in old times the Envoy was based in New York. Therefore I was their eyes and ears in Afghanistan. I gained broad experience with people of Afghanistan, and I experienced some critical and even dangerous moments with them. What helped me feel useful was that, I was with the Afghans all the time and I allowed them to speak out their hearts. I was probably one of the rare foreigners who did not lecture the Afghans on what they should do, and how they should do things right.

One of the main dilemmas between the developed and the developing world is the fact that the more powerful, more developed and advanced nations have the illusion of knowing better about the fate and destiny of other lesser developed countries and nations better than their own citizens. In fact Afghans very well know what their problems are, or why they are failing. But, as you have a proverb in your language, if there are too many cooks in the kitchen, either the food is very salty or it is tasteless.

So, after 30 years when I received the offer to become a candidate to join the Islamic Cooperation Organization office in Kabul, I had absolutely no intention to become another cook in the Afghan kitchen, but I said to myself I could watch the Afghans, carefully listen to them, give a shoulder to them when they need, and act in solidarity with them, also if and when they need. And this needs to be decided by the Afghans, not by others in their name.

“Regardless of whether it pleases the people who rule Afghanistan today or not, the new generation in Afghanistan now has the means to reach out and gain greater access to the world. They have the basic information, and the means. They can better understand and speak foreign languages even if not very fluently, compared to past generations. So, in my opinion there is an emerging “middle class” with relatively better education, who is capable of communicating with the outside world in international standards. So, whoever rules Afghanistan in the future, they can not undo or ignore this new reality. Education, research and knowledge in private and public sectors are and will remain your future. These are assets where the salvation of any society lies.”

You will not find me in a position where I will try to impose upon you, for example, why research is so important—but, I will tell you why I believe, research is essential. In countries like mine, Turkey, which is a medium-scale power, there is a relatively stable state with functioning democratic institutions such as the parliament, the judiciary and the executive are in place, and there are some sorts of checks and balances.

Obviously, the governments are usually a bit defensive and reserved vis-a-vie the non-governmental communities and the civil society. Experts, specialized organizations, the think-tanks, or research centers are seen, in certain parts of the world, as challenges to the central authority. Sometimes, government institutions, authorities and individuals in position of power and influence maybe not so cooperative. They may even be hostile towards non-

governmental entities and communities. In the case of Afghanistan, you are in the process of rebuilding the entire set of institutions of governance, as well as the services sectors, like education, media, humanitarian agencies and activities, where you practically need each and every bit of energy and experience that you can mobilize in the society.

But how government agencies and service delivery institutions interact or liaise with the non-governmental communities is open to discussion. Because not all of these organizations or sectors are regularized by the existing legislation. Sometimes even the basic regulations or operational rules do not exist in certain areas. On such occasions, you can only improvise and devise practical methods and guidelines at your own discretion. The limits of strategic vision or ability to operate for your institutions are tantamount to the amount of budget you can raise, or the human resources, knowledge or access to information you can mobilize. Such factors will determine the limits of your capabilities and achievements.

In the case of Afghanistan, you have different segments of the society. First of all, one has to recognize that a very large part of this country's population is comprised of people between 10 and 50 years of age, and people who are in their fifties have spent the last four decades of their lives (and younger ones their entire life) facing direct conflict and its collateral consequences and damage affecting the civilian population. What do we mean by "Facing direct conflict?" In certain parts of the 34 provinces of Afghanistan, or in districts on the countryside, you don't have effective-functioning government offices. You have local authorities, or even anti-government elements or tribal influences which determine the rule of the day. For instance, what will be the state of basic services, like education and health, if you are living in a remote countryside district where there is no effective government control or authority? Where there is no budget allocated by any central government authority, no teachers, doctors or midwives. Under such circumstance the communities try to improvise, within their own resources and outreach for survival. So, if you do not have a government employed teacher or doctor, you try to find a local teacher, you may go to the clergy, or you may receive any kind of help and supplies from wherever you can. Under such circumstances local population is exposed to whatever comes alongside vital supplies and services for survival beyond their choice.

Afghan people with large refugee population in neighboring countries had to live with this reality in their day-to-day life for decades. Often there are situations where local communities cannot rebuild their homes and villages or cultivate and irrigate their lands, due to conflict, drought or other natural or man-made disasters, sometimes simply because of poverty. Imagine what would happen if you are a part of the society which has been uprooted and internally displaced, you face conditions which compel you to leave your home village taking with you whatever you can carry and move to another location where you have no roots, no relatives, nor any job or income guarantees because of draught, floods, earthquake or even armed conflict. According to UN reports and estimates, as much as one third of the population of your country may not actually have sufficient flour to cook their bread for the next day or the following week, not enough sugar to put in their tea, or fuel to cook or warm up their houses and tents.

So, if you are living in a society which does not have the basic conditions and supplies to sustain a decent living, then you are bound to face those basics—whatever you can provide, you try to survive with it. When you don't have electricity or generator with sufficient fuel, that means your children cannot stay at home, have warm-food or do their homework. According to my own experience, thirty years ago when I was walking in the streets of Kabul, it was a city for 1.5 million people. Ordinary population hardly spoke foreign languages. Only a small elite was educated, and advanced education would come predominantly Russian influence, under government policies of the Saur revolution. In those years, the ruling Afghan elite believed that the only way to modernize this country was the socialist path. Then, there was traditional and conservative resistance from the traditional segments of the society which was also open to outside influences which came along with much needed humanitarian assistance.

When I returned to Kabul thirty years later, I found every second or third young Afghan man or woman understanding and speaking foreign languages. They have smart phones. Everybody is connected with the outside world one way or another. Today's Afghans are very much aware of what is happening not only in neighboring countries, but also in the United States, in Germany, in France, in China or Japan.

“When you have an awakening society, who is fighting for its rights, and who is fast becoming aware of what is available in the outside world, you cannot stop or prevent it from reaching out and getting what it needs.”

Whether that pleases some people or not, the new generation in Afghanistan now has the means of access and understand the world. They obtain information, and they can better communicate with other peoples and cultures, even if they are not very fluent in languages. So, there is a new and rapidly emerging middle class with relatively better education, who communicates with the world at international standards. So, whoever rules Afghanistan in the future, they will have to live, communicate and integrate with this generation.

Therefore, be it related to administrative, educational, scientific, commercial or legal fields in private and public sectors, research and learning will be your future. You are part and parcel of this country and Afghan society. Yes, it is possible that a couple of hundred thousand maybe few million Afghans who are not happy with the current situation, may leave their country and migrate to other countries in search of sustaining their lives outside Afghanistan, but you have more than 30 million Afghans remaining. They are going to have to continue living in this country. Afghanistan belongs to the Afghans. This land is your today, and this will be your tomorrow. So, you are the ones who will have to build the new Afghanistan for yourselves and your children. Certain forces of the society may resist modernity and change some segments of the society may not be sensitive or sufficiently receptive to gender rights or universal criteria. In any case, it has to be the people of Afghanistan who will have to build its own synthesis and rules which will to govern their own country. And you are the ones to build that synthesis and the future. There is nobody else to replace the current generation. Thus, you will have to accept and recognize each other, and you will have work together to build that common future and the new Afghan synthesis.

You may face difficulties in finding jobs in government offices, or at private sector. Achieving higher working and living standards may not be easy. But Afghan society now has better educated human capital, and the new generations are becoming more and more active despite constraints and shortcomings. In my opinion, Afghans are already building their new synthesis and nobody can stop it.

It is also a fact that Afghan society is now communicating with the rest of the world. We are living in a “knowledge society”. The people who actually don’t have the information are reaching out for it. Given the technology revolution and what is now available to ordinary citizens through smart phones and multi-media, even if there are restrictions, people the ways and means of gaining access to information. This is the globalization age and what has been achieved cannot be undone. Knowledge cannot be stopped. People will acquire it no matter at what cost; they will use it, and they will fight for it if necessary. So, I am cautiously optimistic that for the new generation there is a new window of hope opening in Afghanistan (although it may be a narrow one in the beginning). Progress is unstoppable. And you are the builders of the future.

There are certain realities that you have to face. Sadly Afghanistan has been polarized on ethnic and sectarian grounds. But these are artificial boundaries. The Afghan society, by nature, by history and culture is a hospitable one. Throughout history Afghans coming from different roots and cultures traditionally shared their common homeland and coexisted with each other. Afghans recognize and respect each other. But Afghanistan has been suffering for too long, from war and conflict artificially imposed on them. Consequently there are sensitivities and bitternesses. Currently there is too much dust and confusion in the air. But, I am confident that with the help of Afghanistan’s new educated generation, change and solution will come.

“You have to build Afghanistan yourselves. It will not be easy. The road ahead of you is long, steep and thorny. But there will have to be a new and viable Afghan synthesis to govern this country. It will happen. And you are the ones to take over and build it. There is nobody else. Afghans will have to accept and recognize each other. You will have to build and develop a united and pluralistic new society. You are the human capital of Afghanistan. You are the future and you are becoming better and better educated despite all the constraints.”

2nd Question: In your opinion, both from the perspective of OIC and also from what you have seen as a member of the diplomatic community in Afghanistan, as researchers, academics and policy analysts, how can we (a) transmit our ideas over to the diplomatic community, and (b) how can we attain the attention of the diplomatic community to the topics of our policy study?

Ambassador:

I think you are going through a difficult moment of transition. I may, unfortunately, disappoint you with what I will say. What I am observing when I walk in the streets of Kabul, is that the movements of the international community, as well as their access to people and work environment are very severely restricted due to security concerns. I would say, more than half of the quality time of the diplomatic or humanitarian workers is wasted because of security and other restrictions. The most urgent and essential need is security and normalcy.

So, in my opinion, it is essential to find a way to end hostilities and achieve lasting peace and normalisation. Once the hostilities end, and security, law and order are restored, the only way to transform the society, will be through education. As long as Afghan society is unable to offer quality education to its children, the future of the country will be in limbo. So, it means that in the next 10 to 20 years, people of Afghanistan will have to display patience and determination.

3rd Question: Would you be able to shed some light on what factors the international community keep under consideration when developing their policies, for example with regards to the ongoing peace process, what are the factors kept under consideration?

Ambassador:

Well, I can tell you from what I witness. For example, I was in Geneva last November, attending a conference organized by the Government of Afghanistan and the United Nations. More than 70 governments and international organizations attended that conference. This must have been one of the broadest conferences ever since the Bonn Conference and its follow-up international events.

There in Geneva, for example, the representative of the European Union came forward pledging that if the Afghans are in a position to demonstrate to the world, the determination, courage and boldness to sit together around one table and start the process of reconciliation, the European Union on its part will guarantee the continuation of sufficient humanitarian, economic and reconstruction support and assistance without diminishing the resources and political safeguard. And, I can also say that, on the part of the OIC as well, we will also work with the rest of the international community to provide the Afghanistan with every support they need.

“I was here in the month of June when you had the three-day ceasefire. In every standard, what happened has been unique and it was hard to believe. Those people who used to fight and kill each other until the day before the ceasefire, they walked into cities and towns for a period of 72 hours and nobody attacked each other. Taliban didn’t attack women and girls. Nobody plundered houses or government offices. So, it means that actually, an intra-Afghan truce is possible. If a ceasefire can last for 72 hours, it can also continue for 72 days, 72 months or become permanent”

On the part of the OIC, for example, I was instrumental in organizing the OIC-sponsored International Ulema Conference on Peace and Security in Afghanistan in Mecca in July 2018. The Ulema Conference was held on the same dates when NATO member states had a summit meeting in Brussels renewing their commitment for a peaceful Afghanistan.

International community, even those countries who do not share the same ideological views or political platforms, think in the same lines, when it comes to the need for a lasting peaceful settlement in Afghanistan starting with a ceasefire, to be followed by intra-Afghan talks which will pave the way for reconciliation, return of the refugees, integration in the society and reconstruction of Afghanistan.

4th Question: Ambassador Botsali can you explain to us, if there is a policy convergence among the members of the international community when it comes to the Afghan peace process? And, where are there divergence in policy perspectives towards the process?

Ambassador:

Well, the essential thing among both Afghans and outside stakeholders—friends of Afghanistan and other countries—is this crucial question: Am I going to be left out? Are my interests and concerns going to be sufficiently addressed? So, in my opinion inclusiveness is the vital principle. And there is room and need for consensus building, meaning that nobody will be left out, and all legitimate concerns will be addressed one way or another.

In order to be able to sort out who deserves what, what is fair and how such a new balance will become sustainable, the first step is the ending of violence and fighting across the country. People should be able to go out freely and walk in the streets, without having the fear of becoming victim of a clash or suicide attack not only in the provinces, but in the countryside as well. As academic research and studies on conflicts in the world show, foremost requirement for peace process to be advanced is a lasting ceasefire. Initially a sufficiently long-term and subsequently a permanent ceasefire... Once you have a holding extended or permanent ceasefire, then the situation becomes conducive for political settlement and reconciliation negotiations between conflicting parties.

5th Question: Do you see certain elements among international stakeholders presently that might make the peace process more successful compared to what we saw in the early nineties?

Ambassador:

We may compare certain things, but the big picture is not comparable with the past. Let me go back to those years. A prominent member of the communist government used to tell that the Geneva agreement which provided the legal ground for the withdrawal of Soviet forces

from Afghanistan, did not sufficiently address the parameters for post withdrawal, final settlement, repatriation and rehabilitation of Afghan refugees, security and reconstruction of Afghanistan. After Geneva Accords, a pledging conference was held for Afghan reconstruction. As far as I can remember there was around 4 billion dollars of international pledge, but what was committed and done to provide for peaceful transition, normalization and reconstruction of the country has been far from being sufficient and a power vacuum occurred once the Soviet troops left.

“Today, I have a feeling that there is a real opportunity for a peaceful settlement. First of all there is a potential inter-Afghan, regional and international consensus that the war must end and Afghanistan must become peaceful. In early 1990s such regional and international consensus did not exist. In my opinion, despite continuing differences and rivalries, today the domestic political environment is also more conducive for reconciliation and a peaceful settlement.

Forces and elements inside Afghanistan are tired of being exposed to or being part of the conflict. There is nobody untouched. Every family, every individual, every group has lost loved ones. Military, police, civilian, government or opposition, everybody is affected in a way. People are in need of security, normalcy and calm where schools, hospitals and all other services function daily without life threatening risks. People of Afghanistan need and deserve peace and tranquility. I guess the Afghan society is ready for reconciliation after 40 years of violence and conflict. And I believe the time is ripe for peace.

Question 6: In a few of the remarks made by the Taliban Doha Office, they talked about the possibility of OIC playing the role of a guarantor in the peace talks. I know that there has been no official reaction from the OIC or the Afghan government, but the Taliban have been repeatedly talking about OIC’s eventual role. What is your position?

Ambassador:

First of all, let me tell you that OIC is not the United Nations. We don’t have billions of dollars of budget to implement projects and humanitarian programs. And also we do not operate like the UN. Yet, OIC has fifty-seven sovereign member states. And without hesitation I can assure you that all of them want and will be happy to see a lasting peaceful settlement in Afghanistan.

At the time of invasion of Afghanistan by the USSR, OIC has been among the first and most vocal platforms to reject and condemn the occupation. Following the collapse of the Taliban regime as well, OIC has maintained its supportive and constructive standing towards peaceful settlement of the Afghan conflict.

Without exception all OIC Resolutions call for peaceful settlement and ask the Secretary General and member states to help Afghanistan and the peace process. Therefore, when the time comes, if the Government and people of Afghanistan invite OIC to play a constructive role in the peace process, I am sure the OIC will not shy away or hesitate. But in what form, or through what kind of mechanisms can such assistance be given? This will have to be seen.

For the moment I think we are at a critical turning point where the US has been conducting serious talks with the Taliban. Apparently there has been progress in those talks. The Afghan Government, on its part, also has offered unconditional peace talks to Taliban. Last year, there was a short but effective ceasefire. Yet, efforts to extend and renew the ceasefire have not been successful.

Ultimately, it will be the Afghans who will have to sit together around a table and start talking to each other about the future of their country and children. So, once Afghanistan reaches that stage, all those who are true friends of Afghanistan will definitely support Afghan people's decision to incorporate and integrate all segments of the society (hopefully including the Taliban) in a viable peaceful arrangement so that the country finally can start rebuilding itself. I can assure you that OIC will continue supporting Afghanistan in every possible way.

“If the Afghans invite the OIC to play the role of a guarantor, then OIC will not hesitate to assume a role. But in what form, or through what types of mechanisms will have to be seen. At the moment I think we are at a critical point where the US has been carrying out serious talks with the Taliban. But ultimately, it will be the Afghans who will have to sit together around a table and start talking to each other one way or the other. So, once you reach that stage, among other organizations like the UN and EU, those international bodies who are true friends of Afghanistan will have to support Afghan's decision to incorporate and integrate all segments of the society in a viable peaceful arrangement.”

Q&A period:

1. Why OIC was not involved in the peace talks in Qatar? And What roles can OIC play in assisting the process?

Ambassador:

OIC Secretary General has a standing mandate to support peaceful settlement in Afghanistan. This mandate gets renewed every year by the Resolutions of OIC Council of Foreign Ministers.

When the intra-Afghan dialogue reaches a level where it would justify and require OIC to make a contribution, I am sure it will happen.

Afghanistan is a founding member of the OIC. The Afghan Government participates in all the meetings and activities of the OIC and they have the possibility of lobbying for Afghanistan's cause. OIC decides and acts by consensus. And I can say that you cannot find a single act or statement against peace in Afghanistan in OIC resolutions and declarations. So, if Afghanistan wants OIC to become more active in the peace process, Afghanistan needs to become more active within the OIC.

2. Most of the problems that we see are occurring in the Islamic world. What measures have the OIC taken to tackle these problems?

Ambassador:

Let's say it this way: the formation of the United Nations after the second World War was through the transformation of the League of Nations, which was created earlier. When you look at the history of OIC, the creation of OIC was in 1969, and it was in the form of collective reaction of the Muslim world to the worsening situation in Palestine and arsoning of Masjid ul-Aqsa Mosque in Quds. The Muslim world collectively reacted to a unilateral aggression against its values and a common holy site of Muslim faith. So, initially OIC came into being as a politico-religious movement. And if you recall it used to be called Organisation of Islamic Conference. But gradually, and particularly from 2000 onwards, OIC came to realize that it has to implement broader, universally better recognized and more effective agenda and programs as an international organization. It started reforms including changing its title from Organisation of Islamic Conference to Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (acronym remained the same), so, it became an intergovernmental cooperation organization. Subsequently its charter has also been amended. OIC changed its flag, and then it adopted 10-year strategic plan, and later on the Program of Action 2016-2025 pursuing regional and international development objectives similar to those of the UN. OIC has also adopted a Plan of Action for Advancement of Women, a Human Rights Commission and an Observatory Against Islamophobia.

Some people may say that the world has the UN, and OIC member states are the members of the UN. Why should we need the OIC? First of all, the Permanent 5 members of the UN Security Council does not include any representative from the Muslim world. Furthermore, several countries in the Muslim world need greater solidarity even to defend their rights and causes within the UN system or regional networks. Moreover there are Muslim communities in countries who are not members of the OIC, and some of those communities face discrimination, segregation, political pressures, and even in certain cases existential challenges. The Muslim world needs greater solidarity and cooperation to defend its identity, integrity and interests.

OIC is still in its formative phase and it is reforming and developing itself. In recent few years, the organization has come up with a number of reforms and resolutions to form conflict resolution and mediation mechanisms within the Muslim world, election observation units, women's rights platforms and many other specialized institutions. Promoting peace and

sustainable development are among priority mandates of OIC Secretariat. So, we are evolving in the right direction. OIC is a relatively young organization and it does not have abundant resources as more than half of its members states are developing or underdeveloped countries.

I agree with you that a significant number of tensions and hot conflicts of the world occur in and/or around the Muslim world. In addition, there is also the phenomenon of rising “Islamophobia” in the non-Muslim world and this has the potential of turning into a civilizational divide which can, God forbid, trigger broader conflicts. Afghanistan has been one of the hot spots of world for the past 40 years. I am sure that a lasting peaceful settlement of the Afghan issue will have a positive impact at regional and international level.

3. As a Turkish citizen, can you please tell us what Turkey can do in building a regional consensus to bring peace in Afghanistan? Particularly, facilitating Afghanistan’s talks with its immediate neighbors?

Ambassador:

As a Turkish diplomat, I can tell you that first of all I am privileged to enjoy the trust of all segments of the Afghan society, knows well the actors in Afghanistan and enjoys balanced relations with Afghanistan’s neighbors. I am also happy to underline that Turkey is not a party to any disputes that relate to or affect Afghanistan. Recently Prime Minister of Pakistan visited Turkey and peaceful settlement in Afghanistan has been one of the topics discussed. This gives me pride and hope that Turkey is a trusted friend and partner of Pakistan and its neighbors. As a Turkish citizen, I also hope to be able to make a positive contribution through my assignment representing the OIC in Kabul.

Afghans need to be told and feel that they are not alone. When I attend meetings at the UN, NATO, or meet European and other diplomats, I raise my hand, and I say that I am speaking on behalf of 57 Muslim governments representing nearly two billion Muslims of the world, and we stand firmly behind Afghanistan. Afghanistan is not alone and this is good for building peace in and around Afghanistan.

4. As trainees of this program, how can we contribute to our country to raise awareness on the issues that fuel conflict among Afghans?

Ambassador:

Well, **number one:** Stay in Afghanistan. Don’t leave your country. **Number two:** Don not try to invent shortcuts and easy ways.

As I see, you are better off than majority of the poorer and less educated segments of the Afghan society. You are educated. Stay where you are and mobilize your capacity for positive, innovative and productive projects and causes.

Number three; Do not remain silent. Engage in every constructive way to find and/or build solutions towards inter-Afghan consensus, and the new Afghanistan. This may come with a price. The life of your generation will not be easy. Sometimes you will be under pressure and even you may become frustrated. But the price you will pay will be well worth, as it will be to build a better and more advanced Afghan society, and hopefully a prosperous Afghanistan for future generations. If you want peace, security and stability in your country, you need to be ready to make sacrifices for that. People of Afghanistan has already made and are still making huge sacrifices. In my opinion a peaceful, united and safe and stable Afghanistan will be the reward well worth all the sacrifices.

Closing remarks by Mariam Safi:

Mr. Ambassador, thank you once again so much for your time, and for the rich perspectives and analysis you shared with all of us.

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