



AFGHANISTAN'S
CIVIL AND DEMOCRATIC FORCES NETWORK
شبکه نیروهای مدنی و دموکرات افغانستان
د افغانستان د مدنی او دموکراتیکو ځواکونو شبکه

Accountability, Truth, and Reconciliation: Foundations for the Return of Constitutional Governance in Afghanistan

GDP-G & ACDFN Workshop Report | Geneva, 11–12 May 2026





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Contents

<i>Introduction</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Key Themes of the Meeting</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Highlights of Key Discussions</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Conclusion of Day 1</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Day 2 of the Workshop</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Core Functions of the Technical Working Groups</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Group Work and Specialized Discussions</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Outcomes of the Meeting</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Committee Action Plans/Proposals</i>	<i>7</i>

Introduction

A two-day workshop facilitated by the Center for Dialogue and Progress - Geneva (which serves as the Network's secretariat) took place in Geneva. The first day (co-hosted by the Permanent Mission of Afghanistan to UNOG), was attended by members of the ACDFN, consisting of political activists, human rights defenders, journalists, as well as external participants including representatives from international organisations, the United Nations, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, diplomats, and several legal experts and academics, was held at the United Nations Office in Geneva. The meeting, which received extensive media coverage, was convened to discuss the linkages between accountability efforts, truth seeking, transitional justice, and restitution of constitutional order in Afghanistan.

Guided by its belief in the importance of dialogue, the Afghanistan Civil and Democratic Forces Network, a coalition of over 45 civil society organizations, democratic associations, media, and prominent experts, is building an inclusive platform for engagement through which it seeks to shape perspectives and solutions grounded in justice, human rights, peace, and constitutional governance.

Members of the Network believe that in today's complex circumstances, the responsibility of civil society and intellectual leaders extends beyond simply talking about the crises. It requires drawing on knowledge, experience, and constructive dialogue to lay the groundwork for national discourse and for solutions based on participation, justice, and coexistence. Viewed from this perspective, the Geneva meeting forms part of the Network's broader effort to strengthen a culture of dialogue, build bridges between thinkers and activists, and draw the attention of the international community to the difficult conditions facing the Afghan people and to the need to support processes grounded in human rights, justice, and the rule of law.



Key Themes of the Meeting

Following the Taliban military takeover in 2021, Afghanistan has entered one of the most complex and critical periods in its contemporary history. The collapse of the constitutional order, the concentration of power in the absence of accountable institutions, sweeping restrictions on fundamental rights and freedoms, the systematic exclusion of women and girls from educational, economic, political, and social life, rising poverty and unemployment, a deepening humanitarian crisis, the arrest and suppression of civil society activists, and the steady erosion of governance structures have together confronted the country with deep, multilayered challenges. At the same time, the persistence of impunity, the absence of effective accountability mechanisms, and the lack of a clear vision for political transition have raised serious concern among democratic forces, human rights defenders, Afghan civil society organisations, and the international community.

The day one of the meeting, held on 11 May 2026 at the United Nations Office, received extensive coverage in national and international media, gave experts, specialists, and the network members a platform for dialogue and exchange on how accountability efforts could be linked with broader transitional justice efforts and backed by a political process that brings about such a transition. The meeting's objective was not only to present a clearer picture of the current situation but also to help build an inclusive dialogue on ways out of the crisis, strengthen a culture of accountability, support victims' rights, restore the rule of law, and lay the groundwork for a sustainable and just peace in Afghanistan.



Highlights of Key Discussions at the Meeting

Human Rights Situation and the Need for Accountability

Reflecting on nearly five years of Taliban rule, speakers voiced concern over the continued, widespread violation of human rights, the suppression of fundamental freedoms, arbitrary detention, torture, ethnic and religious discrimination, and the systematic exclusion of women from educational, economic, political, and social life.

Richard Bennett, Special Rapporteur on Afghanistan, stressed that Afghan women and girls face the most severe forms of discrimination and repression—conditions that may amount to crimes against humanity and “gender apartheid.” He underscored the need to end the culture of impunity and to make full use of all available mechanisms to hold those responsible for serious human rights violations to account. Participants agreed that lasting peace is not possible without truth and accountability, and that any future political process must be grounded in justice, respect for human dignity, and the rights of victims.

Transitional Justice and the Importance of Documentation

A significant portion of the meeting was devoted to examining Afghanistan’s past experiences alongside relevant international examples. Drawing on the experiences of South Africa, Syria, Rwanda, and the former Yugoslavia, speakers emphasized that transitional justice should not be reduced to retribution; rather, its purpose should be to uncover the truth, acknowledge the suffering of victims, build trust, and lay the foundation for reconciliation and lasting peace.

Sima Samar, former Chairperson of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, drawing on Afghanistan’s own experience with transitional justice, noted that a lack of political will has hindered many efforts related to documentation, the memorialization of victims, and institutional vetting. She stressed that victims, above all, seek recognition of their suffering, and that any future process must be grounded in victims’ rights and their meaningful participation.

Michelle Jarvis, a leading expert in international criminal law, drawing on the experience of Syria, emphasized the need to link criminal justice, truth-seeking, and social reconstruction, noting that justice can contribute to peace only when it leads to genuine change in the structures that produce violence and human rights violations.



The Role of Women and the Need for Inclusion

One of the central themes of the meeting was the position of women in political and peace processes. Speakers stressed that excluding women from decision-making and peace processes not only violates their fundamental rights but also poses a threat to lasting peace in Afghanistan's political future.

International experience shows that peace agreements in which women have not played an effective role have, in many cases, failed. Participants therefore emphasized that women's participation must be genuine, effective, and substantive—not merely symbolic—at every stage of a political process, from design through implementation.

Speakers also stressed the importance of girls' education, support for the younger generation, and a stronger role for civil society in shaping Afghanistan's future.



The Constitution and the Crisis of the Rule of Law

The rule of law and the status of the constitution were among the meeting's central themes. Legal experts pointed to the de facto suspension of the 2004 constitution and the complete concentration of power within the Taliban structure, describing Afghanistan's current situation as an example of "governance without a constitution."

Speakers noted that, despite its shortcomings, the 2004 constitution had provided an important framework for protecting human rights, the separation of powers, and political participation. However, weak enforcement, widespread corruption, the concentration of power, and the absence of a culture of the rule of law prevented its objectives from being fully realized.

Some participants emphasized that any future political system must be grounded in a new constitution, the separation of powers, accountability, prevention of the concentration of power, and the guarantee of citizens' fundamental rights and freedoms.

Afghanistan's International Obligations

International law experts at the meeting emphasized that, despite the political changes since 2021, Afghanistan's international obligations remain in force, and that a change in the structure of power cannot absolve the country of the responsibilities arising from international human rights treaties. They stressed the need to keep the world engaged with and committed to Afghanistan and its people, so that international support continues.

In their view, the conduct of the current rulers, who have disregarded virtually all of Afghanistan's international obligations, should not result in Afghanistan being excluded from the scope of the international resolutions and conventions that the country's legitimate governments signed and ratified in the past, nor should the current legal context be used as an excuse for non-compliance with obligations arising from treaties Afghanistan state is a party.

The Need for National Dialogue and International Cooperation

Speakers emphasized the importance of inclusive dialogue among democratic political forces, civil society, women, youth, and other segments of society, expressing the view that Afghanistan's future requires a political process grounded in human rights, justice, accountability, and broad participation.

They also stressed the importance of strengthening cooperation between Afghan civil society, international organizations, regional states, and human rights institutions, and underscored the need for political and financial support for an independent investigative mechanism on Afghanistan.



Conclusion of day 1:

The Geneva meeting took place at a time when Afghanistan continues to face one of the most complex political, legal, humanitarian, and social crises in its modern history. The continued, widespread violation of human rights, the absence of the rule of law, the systematic exclusion of women from public life, the economic and humanitarian crisis, the collapse of accountable institutions, and the persistence of impunity have given rise to deep concern among Afghan citizens and the international community. Against this backdrop, the gathering of political activists, human rights defenders, experts, representatives of international institutions, and civil society in Geneva provided a valuable opportunity for exchange, reflection, and discussion of ways out of Afghanistan's current crisis.

As a main output of the event, a statement was issued, endorsed by the members of the ACDFN, outlining the main areas of convergence, concerns, and demands of the participants. The full statement is attached as Annex 2 to this report.

The discussions underscored that lasting peace and political stability in Afghanistan cannot rest on short-term political agreements alone but require an approach grounded in truth, justice, accountability, respect for human dignity, inclusive citizen participation, and the restoration of the rule of law. Participants emphasized that, without addressing the root causes of the crisis, without ending the culture of impunity, and without ensuring the meaningful participation of women, victims, youth, civil society, and other effective forces, lasting peace and a legitimate, accountable system of governance will remain out of reach.

The meeting also reaffirmed the important role of Afghan civil society and democratic forces in preserving collective memory, documenting victims' suffering, defending human rights values, and building bridges of dialogue across different segments of society. At a time when the civic space in Afghanistan faces unprecedented restrictions, the continuation of such initiatives can help prevent the situation of the people of Afghanistan from being forgotten.



The Network of Afghan Democratic and Civil Forces, as one of the active platforms for cooperation and dialogue, has in recent years brought the voices of Afghan citizens—particularly marginalized groups, victims, women, and the younger generation—to international forums. Organizing specialized meetings, facilitating dialogue, holding joint initiatives, and participating in processes related to justice, human rights, and Afghanistan's future have all formed part of the Network's effort to strengthen a culture of participation, accountability, and national cohesion.

Participants in the Geneva meeting held that Afghanistan's future requires the emergence of an inclusive, responsible political process grounded in universal human rights values—a process in which all Afghan citizens, without discrimination, can play a role in determining their country's future. In this regard, dialogue, constructive engagement, the documentation of truth, the strengthening of accountability mechanisms, and support for initiatives grounded in transitional justice were identified as essential elements for the transition from the current situation toward a future built on peace, stability, and justice.

In this spirit, ACDFN underscores the importance of continuing such meetings, expanding cooperation with international institutions, strengthening ties among experts, civil society activists, and political forces, and creating space for the emergence of national discourse.

The Geneva meeting once again demonstrated that, despite the existing complexities, considerable intellectual, civic, and human capacity remains among Afghans—capacity that, if preserved and strengthened, can help lay the groundwork for a vision grounded in justice, the rule of law, peaceful coexistence, and broad participation in building Afghanistan's future.

In closing, participants emphasized that the Afghanistan crisis must not be allowed to fade from the international community's agenda. Sustained international attention, support for truth-seeking and accountability mechanisms, defense of the rights of women and girls, support for civil society, and the creation of space for national dialogue are among the elements that can help guide Afghanistan toward a lasting peace grounded in justice and human dignity.



Day 2 of the Workshop **The ACDFN Strategy and Mobilization** *12 May 2026, Geneva*

The coordination meeting of members of the Afghanistan Democratic and Civil Institutions Network was held in Geneva, Switzerland, to set objectives and outline the Network's work plan for 2026.

The meeting's primary purpose was to welcome new members; review the implementation of the Network's 2025 action plan and ongoing activities; improve its organizational structure; consider recent membership applications; set priorities for the year; develop operational procedures for and activate the committees; and finally identify further capacity-building opportunities for members. The meeting also focused on strengthening coordination with

like-minded institutions, inviting prominent figures to the international advisory board, expanding engagement and advocacy with international organizations working on Afghanistan, and building cooperation with institutions working on human rights, humanitarian assistance, climate change, and sustainable development.

The Network holds that responding effectively to the current situation in Afghanistan requires extensive, specialized, effective, and advocacy-focused work, so that the people of Afghanistan can access stronger support at the international level. To this end, the Network is working to take more effective steps toward expanding targeted, results-oriented activities, drawing on lessons from experience and Afghanistan's core needs. Accordingly, the Network's secretariat (the Centre for Dialogue and Progress - Geneva) held a one-day meeting in Geneva on 12 May 2026, attended by close to 50 representatives of member organizations. This report summarizes the main topics discussed.

Main Themes of the Meeting

The meeting opened with welcoming remarks from Mr. Masoud Amer, Head of the Network's Executive Board, who outlined the meeting's objectives, followed by the introduction of the member organisations and individuals and the areas of their focus. The participants then break into 4 working groups corresponding to the focus areas of the 4 permanent committees, as follows:

- Peace, Governance, and Democracy Committee
- Human Rights and Gender Committee
- Media and Public Relations Committee
- Capacity-Building Committee

These committees have defined technical and advisory mandates and play a key role in improving the Network's activities.

Core Functions of the Technical Working Groups (TWGs)

The functions of the Technical Working Groups include:

- Developing and reviewing policies, core frameworks, and working documents
- Advising on the Network's positions at the national, regional, and international levels
- Identifying emerging political, social, and economic trends and facilitating cooperation with like-minded institutions
- Conducting research, analysis, and publications in areas relevant to the Network's work
- Strengthening coordination of working approaches and methodologies
- Strengthening engagement with effective national and international actors
- Participating in international conferences, meetings, and forums
- Raising the Network's profile as an influential actor in policymaking

Group Work and Specialized Discussions

In the second part of the meeting, the working groups discussed and worked on:

- Developing committees' operational plans
- Setting annual objectives
- Identifying capacity-building needs
- Reviewing avenues for cooperation with domestic and international institutions
- Aligning programs with the Network's charter and strategic plan

The purpose of this exercise was to build a more coherent structure for specialized, policy-driven activities, enabling each working group to produce practical, implementable plans within its defined mandate.

Outcomes of the Meeting

The expert committees discussed their respective priorities and initiated the development of annual operational plans. While some committees identified more detailed areas of action, others agreed that further technical discussions and consultations were required to refine their priorities and develop coherent work plans.

In accordance with the terms of reference, the committees set priorities and scheduled their in-person and virtual activities. At the close of the meeting, committee representatives presented the outcomes of the deliberations within their respective working groups to the general participants. The Steering Committee, in coordination with the Network's secretariat, committed to reviewing the submitted documents and taking the steps needed for their implementation, including resource mobilization and operational support.

In accordance with the terms of reference for the specialized committees, the Technical Working Groups (TWGs) were established as the Network's advisory, strategic, and operational bodies to strengthen coherence, policy coordination, the setting of advocacy priorities, and the overall quality of the Network's activities.

Annexes I

Note: The proposals and work plans of each committee are presented separately below as an annex to the report to provide an accurate record of the deliberations.

Committee Action Plans/Proposals

1. Capacity-Building Committee Proposal

Capacity building for Afghan human rights organisations, research institutions, and similar entities in Europe is typically designed and delivered around several key areas. Priorities may vary by organization, but the most important areas are as follows:

1. Institutional Capacity

This area focuses on strengthening the organization's managerial and strategic infrastructure, including developing or revising a 3-to-5-year strategic plan, strengthening leadership structures and the board of directors, establishing a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system, Risk management, and continuity of operations. Developing human resources and organizational leadership

2. Financial Sustainability and Resource Development (Fundraising & Sustainability)

Preparing and managing proposals for international donors, diversifying funding sources, identifying and assessing potential donors, ensuring financial and administrative compliance.

3. Research and Analytical Capacity (Research Capacity)

Strengthening quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods research skills using data analysis tools, producing policy reports and analytical documents.

5. Digital Security

Strengthening digital protection, secure communication, data safety, risk awareness, and the ability of civil society organisations to protect sensitive information, members, partners, and victims.

4. Legal and Advocacy Capacity (Legal & Advocacy)

Pursuing strategic advocacy and litigation, documenting human rights violations, engaging with United Nations mechanisms, and cooperating with European Union institutions and other international bodies



6. Partnerships and Networking: Building coalitions and consortiums; Stakeholder management and expanding to ACDFN to include underrepresented categories of members.

From the Capacity-Building Committee's perspective, five core priorities for civil society organisations in Europe are: financial sustainability, monitoring and evaluation systems, advocacy and policy impact, digital security, and leadership and organizational capacity development.

2. Peace, Governance, and Democracy Working Committee Proposal

The Committee held broad discussions on Afghanistan's current political and governance crisis, the absence of constitutional order, and the relationship between peace, political legitimacy, and accountable governance. Members reflected on Afghanistan's previous constitutional experiences and agreed on the importance of learning from their strengths and shortcomings. There was broad agreement that any future political and constitutional framework should be grounded in popular sovereignty, the rule of law, separation of powers, accountability, protection of fundamental rights, and meaningful citizen participation.

The Committee also emphasised that sustainable peace cannot be achieved through limited political arrangements alone and requires a structured and inclusive national dialogue involving civil society, women, youth, political and democratic forces, and other segments of Afghan society. Given the complexity and breadth of these issues, members agreed that further technical discussion and consultation are required before adopting a detailed work plan. The Committee will therefore continue its engagement through virtual meetings and expert consultations, focusing on constitutional governance, inclusive national dialogue, peace and political processes, and institutional accountability. A more detailed report and action plan will be developed following these discussions.

Members of the Committee created relevant WhatsApp Groups to remain engaged in and agreed to further deliberate the topic during the next 3 months.



3. Human Rights and Gender Committee Proposal

The Committee focused its discussions on the unprecedented deterioration of the rights and status of women and girls in Afghanistan and their systematic exclusion from education, employment, public life, and political decision-making. Members expressed particular concern that the continued erosion of women's rights is becoming normalised and stressed the need for stronger and more coordinated advocacy to ensure that the rights of Afghan women and girls remain central to national and international discussions on Afghanistan.

The Committee also discussed the meaningful participation of women in future political, peace, constitutional, and national dialogue processes. Members agreed that women's participation should not be symbolic or treated as a secondary issue, but must be an essential element of any credible process concerning Afghanistan's future. The Group further highlighted the importance of engaging Afghan women from diverse backgrounds, including women's rights activists, civil society leaders, academics, and younger women, to better reflect their experiences, perspectives, and priorities.



Given the scale and complexity of the challenges facing Afghan women and girls, the Committee agreed to continue its discussions and consultations before finalising a detailed work plan. Further meetings will focus on women's rights and gender equality, women's meaningful political participation, girls' education, coordinated international advocacy, and strengthening the voices of Afghan women. A more detailed report and action plan will be developed following these consultations.

4. Media and Public Relations Committee Proposal

The Committee discussed ways to strengthen ACDFN's visibility, public engagement, and strategic communication with Afghan civil society, diaspora communities, media actors, academic institutions, international organizations, and the wider public. Members emphasized that effective communication is important for advancing the Network's mission of promoting democracy, human rights, justice, and coordinated civil society action for Afghanistan.

The Committee identified key priorities, including improving ACDFN's digital platforms, publishing newsletters, policy briefs, reports, and testimonial stories, engaging with Afghan and international media, and organizing webinars, roundtables, public forums, and advocacy campaigns.

The Committee agreed to focus on raising public awareness, expanding engagement with civil society and diaspora networks, supporting advocacy initiatives, and managing communication risks such as misinformation, digital access limitations, and the protection of civil society members.





Center for Dialogue and Progress – Geneva (CDP-G)
Afghanistan Civil and Democratic Forces Network (ACDFN)

