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The Collapse of the Afghan Republic Government and Illegitimacy of the Current Regime in Afghanistan

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The Transparent Elections Foundation of Afghanistan (TEFA), in collaboration with 25 civil society organizations (CSOs) launched a thorough assessment of the situation in Afghanistan. This position paper is the result of continued dialogues and discussions among CSOs both inside and outside the country and identifies key factors behind the collapse of the democratic state prior August 15, 2021. The paper also sets out key lessons learned regarding the formation of an inclusive government and highlights the likelihood of challenges and warnings associated with the illegitimate regime of the Taliban. The position paper further intends to attract the attention of international community to the situation in Afghanistan and contribute to building a new momentum and commitment for a better Afghanistan. TEFA has used different research and assessment methods consist of in person Interviews, focus groups, to be able to showcase the reality of the atmosphere on the ground and people's perception and desire for a better future.

Background:

In 2001, after the collapse of the first Taliban regime, Afghans in partnership with international community, an interim government followed by a transitional government was established to set the basis for a legitimate state and government in Afghanistan. This historical transformation happened in collaboration among ethical groups, political parties, and international community as the means of to fight international terrorism and promoting democracy in Afghanistan. In 2004, with generous support from international community and United Nations, the first presidential election was held and in 2005 the first parliamentary and provincial councils' elections were conducted. Those were amongst the first successful indicators of establishing good governance after decades of conflicts and bloodshed. The people of Afghanistan, during the period of 2001 and 2021 have experienced the democratic state and processes as means for good governance and legitimate state and have taken place in all elections processes to form a legitimate state and government and elect their representatives. Though all the elections had their own challenges and shortfalls, yet the process had given public a chance to cast their votes and participate in decision-making processes. Afghanistan was on the path to establish a legitimate state, and people's situation had improved politically, socially, and economically. With the total collapse of the democratic state and Taliban's victory, the Afghanistan's state and

institutions has lost their legitimacy, the public has lost its elected representation , and due to Taliban intimidations and assassinations , much of its human capital(leaders, professionals , women activists , young talents) left the country .this exodus has led to severe economic downturn, collapse of state Institutions, injustice and endemic poverty. Amongst the younger generation of Afghans (70% of the populations is below the age of 30 years old) feel hopeless, abandonment, and live in constant fear. Women and girls are especially targeted being deprived from higher education, unable to work and are prevented from being active member of the society.

Key Factors for Collapse:

According to TEFA's assessment reports, views of credible national and international institutions and professionals, the fundamental factors of the collapse of the state and the smooth take-over of power by Taliban regime on August 15, 2021, are as follow:

- Adoption of inappropriate, divisive, and discriminatory policies,
- Excessive expectation of Afghan government from international community
- Lack of appropriate security policies against the Taliban
- Contradictory actions of the international community related to Afghan situation/ affairs,
- lack of commitment and sincerity of Taliban to peace process and inappropriate government's peace policy framework
- Weak political parties and their inappropriate political dealings and actions pervasive
- systematic corruption in election processes
- rampant corruption
- Lack of contextually appropriate development programs and interventions
- Rushed and unconditional based security transition from international security forces to Afghan security forces
- Hasty withdrawal of international security forces particularly the United States of forces from Afghanistan.

Politicians and Political Structures:

Political parties in democratic society are the guardians of the elected government. On the contrary, compared to other countries, in Afghanistan the parties were not properly formed and could not have sustainable activities to strengthen democratic process. During the past twenty years, the international community made many efforts to develop political parties, but these efforts did not lead to favorable results, and in the end, the parties turned into individual-oriented political structures, without a comprehensive, non-normative, with no perspective and program and non-strategic. Apart from the fact that these parties were not able to play a constructive and effective role, they were not able to strengthen the process of government system and nation building and support Afghanistan's nascent democracy, On the contrary, they strengthened extremism and engaged bargaining with their various affiliations and short-term interests that in turn caused negative impacts on Afghanistan's democratic process and elections were weakened. Politicians at all levels and those who played a role in the previous government,

despite their presence alongside the key pillars of the republican government, worked against the government and tried to discredit and destroy the components of the elections. The absence of democratic parties caused the political system to be formed based on politicians' deals, and the person who was in power acted more according to the demands and interest of the politicians involved in the power equation than serving and responding to the people.

The lack of a strong opposition was also a fundamental challenge of the republic government, and this meant that no organized, purposeful, and program-oriented political group could stand up against the government's misbehavior and try to improve it. Elections are based on the principle of winners and losers, but all the country's politicians expected to win the elections, the losers did not accept the election results, instead of addressing the challenges and identifying election frauds, extra-legal ways were created, and quasi-legal justifications were made, which meant the democratic components became victims of politicians' wrong policies and actions which scandalized the democratic process in Afghanistan.

Although in the short life of Afghanistan's democratic government, political and social participation was favorable for women, but women did not have a role to influence political decision-making. The roles were largely symbolic, and the progress was mostly made due to the pressures of the civil society, media and the international community, and the government was not honestly committed to empowering women and women's sovereignty over their own destiny.

Elections:

Elections are undeniable principles of the democratic system and the process of good governance, which used as a legitimate means to reach power and make people the rulers of their destiny. Despite of the fact that elections in Afghanistan were not free of challenges and there were always many shortfalls in this process, but still, as one of the significant political platforms in Afghanistan, it was a great mechanism and an opportunity to connect the people to the system.

According to TEFA's assessment reports from seven rounds of elections, one of the fundamental factor that caused the collapse of the republic government and paved the ground for Taliban rule; was the holding of non-standard and unacceptable elections followed with major challenges such as inaccurate census and list of real voters, weak engagement of political parties in the electoral system, pervasive systematic corruption and electoral fraud, government interference in the electoral cycle and decisions, violation of the legal framework ,huge budget, lack of attention to holding transparent and acceptable elections for the people and the international community, ethnicization of elections, destruction of election processes by ethnical , provincial and extremist factionalists and stonewalling of regional intelligence, and even more importantly, those who They were against the government by opening a foothold in the system and with assisting foreigner intelligence activities, they caused Afghanistan state to collapse.

Afghanistan Peace Process:

According to the reports of the Afghanistan Peace House (APH), which is an umbrella of peace-related institutions, the Afghan peace process that commenced in 2008 was a closed and complex process that, in addition had no roadmap, did not have a clear mechanism and definition. Since it was not clear with whom there would be peace or war, and this process was considered more of a political expedient than a real process to bring peace to Afghanistan, and as the international community was interested in such a process, both sides of the peace negotiation apparently agreed to negotiate on the surface. None of the parties to the negotiation was flexible and the peace efforts were more of a show that served as a source of income and credit for the members of the republic government and a means of identity building for the Taliban group which ultimately gained international legitimacy for the Taliban. People particularly women, and youth were not engaged in the peace process in any way and the process was limited to selected group of politicians. Demonstration meetings and activities were held, but people's opinions were not considered. At the same time, there was no clear roadmap and subsequent plans for post-peace and reintegration because there was no belief in the coming of real peace among the peace actors.

For the politicians within the republic government, the peace process was more of a process to compete and achieve their own political interests than to ensure the stability, prosperity, and development of the country. Within the republic government, there was no unified position regarding the process and results of the peace process, for example, the presidency and the executive section of republic government, although they were on the same side of the issue, still had different views on significant peace issues.

The position of the Taliban was clear from the beginning, and they were not willing to make peace with the republic government but instead, they preferred to make a deal with the Americans. Furthermore, the Taliban saw war as a practical tool to achieve their strategic goals. On the other hand, in the Taliban group, the main decision-makers were not clear as to who would make the final decision under what conditions and with what thoughts, which further complicated the peace process.

Global and regional players did not play a special role in accelerating and improving the peace process because they did not believe in the process to that extent. Even though the international players knew the weak points of the Afghan peace process and were aware that this process would not be successful and on the contrary, the republic government would be weakened, but they were still not honest with the people of Afghanistan and continued to engage in exhibitivie activities.

International Community:

According to national and international experts, the international community, which was the financial and technical supporter of Afghanistan's democratization efforts over the past two

decades, played a significant role in most Afghanistan's national decisions, and without their approval, no changes and determinations in the structure could be made.

Some of the international community players often had contradictory approaches toward Afghanistan's issues and played a double policy in regional issues related to Afghanistan. Considering the financial and technical assistance they provided to Afghanistan to fight terrorism and strengthen democracy in Afghanistan, they could not achieve tangible results. Finally, it is said that the international community failed to build a peaceful Afghanistan. Apparently, the international community always emphasized on the Afghanization of processes such as elections, but at the political level, they intervened in the formation of governments and structures, and in relation to many key issues such as peace, even though they knew who the Taliban are and what risks threatens Afghanistan, they were silent. Even the international community failed with all its efforts against corruption and the fight against drugs. In a bigger picture, these kind of policies of global players were one of the main factors of the downfall of the republic government and the biggest failure for their goals, efforts, and investments.

Corruption:

Pervasive corruption, along with other factors, was one of the main causes of the collapse of the republic government, because with each passing day, corruption increased at the level of provinces and districts, leading to people's dissatisfaction, and finally, the distance between the people and the government increased, and in the end it was irreparable. Of course, the government of Afghanistan and the international community tried to fight against this sinister phenomenon, but most of these efforts were not real and did not have a firm to behind them.

We witnessed the projects that were given to fight corruption were delegated in exchange for a percentage and a bribe by donors. Corruption did not only decrease, but slowly took different forms, among which we can mention political corruption, which is called the axis of all corruptions. The sale of government seats, appointments based on political preferences and interests rather than meritocracy, and decisions made by members of parliament in exchange for huge deals and bribes have all reduced people's trust in Afghanistan's political structures. On the other hand, substantial corruption in the judiciary and judgments based on bribes and the transformation of the judicial system into a self-serving and corrupt system had made the people extremely unhappy, raised tensions and further weakened the government and the legitimacy of the system. Besides, the increase in sexual harassment and many accusations against the first-level government structures such as the presidency, etc., in a traditional society like Afghanistan, had unfortunate repercussions, which resulted in people's disgust and dissatisfaction.

On the other hand, the fight against corruption, the Afghan government relied on limited structures such as the Afghanistan Attorney General's Office, and in the end, these institutions were unable to carry out any activities in the fight against corruption, and even in cases with all the documents they had They were satisfied with expedient reports.

Afghanistan after the Collapse of the Republic Government:

In proportion to a series of understandings and deals between global and regional players with the Taliban, failed leadership and management of government leaders, the republic government collapsed in August 2021 and without any resistance, Afghanistan was handed over to the Taliban, which was a great excitement for the low-ranking member of Taliban, and they were not prepared for such a transition.

Taliban were largely founded by Pakistan's inter-services intelligence that they used the Taliban to establish a favourable government in Afghanistan and they are a tool set for Pakistan to support and fund other terrorist's groups. Taliban is a radical and extremist religious group that had no background and experience of orderly and democratic governance and acts according to their understanding of Sharia. In the beginning of their ruling, Taliban used an expedient approach and announced a general amnesty, but later they imposed more restrictions and failed to fulfil their commitments made with global and regional players, which until today caused the legitimacy of their government to be taken away. In general, in the past one year, Taliban, based on their thinking, did not discuss the important issue of elections and democratic values. As a result, the government they established, considering that it does not represent the will of the people, has no legal and political legitimacy either domestically or internationally, but it is even gradually removed from the list of independent world countries.

Considering the status of Taliban's government in Afghanistan, the situation is getting worse, which is not only dangerous for Afghanistan and its people, but it is an alarm for the countries of the region and the world, that may not attract much attention in the short term, but in the long run, these countries will be threatened with dire consequences.

Hereby, Transparent Elections Foundation of Afghanistan (TEFA), considering the lessons learned from 20 years and the significant challenges of Afghanistan, it presents the following demands and calls on the related parties and donor countries to pay serious attention to the implementation of the following demands:

A) International Community:

- The international community must increase political and economic pressure on the Taliban to hold them accountable and pay serious attention to the needs of the people in terms of providing security, social welfare, freedom of expression and good governance.
- The international community should assist Afghanistan with providing the ground for an inclusive dialogue with the presence of representatives of all ethnic groups and parties to the conflict, in relation to the formation of an inclusive government, to create a roadmap to find a solution to the current situation and create a government in which everyone can see themselves.
- The international community must not forget Afghanistan and its people in such a critical situation and besides increasing their humanitarian assistance, they should pay more attention to poverty, social and economic crisis.

b) Taliban:

- For the sake of the people and values of Afghanistan, Taliban should admit the establishment of the inclusive system and provide all the required support for the implementation of it..
- Taliban should fulfill their commitment made with the international community and provide education and work access for Afghan girls and women as soon as possible.
- Taliban should respect international conventions, especially human rights conventions, and stop torturing, imprisoning, and killing former military personnel of the republic government and other military and civilian people.

c) Political Groups:

- Political parties and groups should stop playing with people's destiny and should not victimize people and the stability of the country for their own political interests.
- Politicians who were in various positions in the republic government during the past twenty years and have been tainted with corruption and committed crimes and the downfall of the republic government, no longer have credibility with the people and it is better to stop deceiving the people under different names and gatherings.
- Political groups should not once again throw Afghanistan and its people into the arms of regional and world intelligence agencies to promote foreign intelligence programs.

d) People:

- Women activists who are based outside of Afghanistan should assist women's advocacy initiatives there rather than concentrating solely on their own financial gain and personal interests.
- All segments of the society, experts, public, and civil society must be agreed, supported each other, and put pressure on the Taliban so that the inclusive government finds its place in Afghanistan.
- National awareness must be formed, and multiple divisions should be prevented so that the people's advocacy results and finally, the committed, expert, and constructive generation of the country will come together and to lead the peace process and future government of Afghanistan.

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