

## Promoting Civic Engagement: National Civil Society Week Ends in Herat

The event provided CSOs and their partners from different regions, provinces and backgrounds with an open space for reflection, learning, and networking. Governor of Herat Province, Mr Abdul Qayum Rahimi, emphasised, 'This event is a great platform for discussion, knowledge sharing, networking and cooperation, especially, between the local government and CSOs, and among CSOs from different provinces. The recommendations that come out of the event will help the government improve its relations with the citizens and provide better services.'

In working groups and panels, the participants debated the conditions required for an environment in which CSOs can work independently and efficiently as well as in accordance with Afghan law. They also discussed how the diversification of funding and voluntarism could make CSOs more sustainable. Other topics included the role of civil society activists and informal groups in social change, Afghanistan's progress in achieving the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and how CSOs could support the peacebuilding process in the country. Lastly, the participants reflected on cooperation with each other and with the government as well as pooling resources to make CSOs' work more impactful.

'Such debates hardly ever take place at the provincial level and this many representatives rarely come under the same roof. Therefore, this is a great opportunity for us to discuss crucial issues related to the civil society and civic space with local CSOs from different provinces and other partners,' said Director of the Afghan Civil Society Forum Organisation (ACSFO), Mr Aziz Rafiee.

A number of activities will follow the National Civil Society Week, including the publication of policy briefs and the development of guidelines and toolkits for CSOs. The AICS will work on these products based on the gathered input and discussions throughout the event. They will be distributed to all relevant stakeholders and roundtables and will serve as the starting point for deeper dialogue, analysis and exploration.

A strong civil society is crucial for the country's sustainable development, for building peace, and to promote dialogue instead of conflict.

*The Open Policy Advisory Fund (OPAF) is implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH on behalf of the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). Since 2009, the project has been financing the deployment of expertise in Afghan institutions and training their staff to build capacities and facilitate the implementation of reforms in line with good governance criteria. Flexibility and rapid responses to support requests are key to OPAF's approach. Among other activities, the project organised professional and job-specific training for more than 200 decision-makers working at state institutions from 2014 onwards.*

Teaser text:

A three-day event called National Civil Society Week ended on Friday in Herat. The Afghan Institute for Civil Society (AICS) coordinated this event that brought together around 150 representatives, including 41 women, from civil society, the government, academia, the private sector, the United Nations (UN) and media from across the country. AICS aims at supporting Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in Afghanistan in realising their potential for the country's development. The Afghan-German Cooperation's programme Open Policy Advisory Fund (OPAF) provided financial and technical support for the event.

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