



**Some Concluding Remarks
from the Dubai Seminar
(22-23 September 2012)**

Pugwash recently held a meeting in Dubai on issues related to the peace and dialogue in Afghanistan and possible future compromises. Participants came from Afghanistan - belonging to different groups - and from the UN, as well as from other countries. The representatives of the Taliban defined themselves as observers. The meeting was not intended as a negotiation of any kind, but rather as a free exchange of ideas. Also we have to stress that Pugwash attitude in any initiative dealing with conflict resolution is strictly impartial and aimed at building reciprocal trust among the participants.

There was consensus that the reconciliation process in Afghanistan is vital not only for Afghanistan itself, but for the stability of the entire region as well.

Any free exchange of opinion could be useful for gathering new ideas that could be used later in negotiations for the reconciliation process, which must be Afghan-led.

Reconciliation should aim to bring about peace in Afghanistan, while preserving its unity.

All parties and groups should concur on a definition of what constitutes Afghan political life, giving rise to an honest sharing of power. The constitution, as the framework that defines the basis of political life in Afghanistan, should also be part of the debate among different groups that will hopefully be conducive to reconciliation.

Afghanistan will in any case be an Islamic country, and the principles at the basis of social and political life will be consistent with and inspired by Islam. It is part of long-standing Islamic tradition to protect and guarantee the freedom of expression of non-Muslim citizens, as well as non-Muslims who visit in peace and respect Islamic values.

Afghans of all groups should find a way to communicate in peace. Some general, at least provisional, ceasefire would be of great help. There was a proposal for the declaration of a conflict-free region or area in Afghanistan wherein negotiations could take place.

There was a consensus that Afghanistan should never be used as a base for any aggressive action conducted by any group against any other country. Similarly, Afghanistan should not be attacked by any group based in any other country.

One very urgent problem is the number of civilian casualties that results from war. All groups and military forces should refrain, starting immediately, from taking any action that might result in civilian casualties.

It was suggested that foreign troops should completely leave Afghanistan, and the sooner the better. The money being spent to keep troops into Afghanistan should instead be spent on the reconstruction of Afghanistan. Until then, it is hoped that the remaining foreign troops and the insurgents might make a deal that would bring about a ceasefire and allow peaceful negotiations among Afghans.

All responsibility for the continuing conflict among armed forces and armed groups lies with those who refuse to negotiate a suspension of armed confrontation. But in any case, civilian lives should be spared at all costs.

Someone suggested that perhaps peacekeeping forces from Islamic countries, instead of the present foreign forces, should be placed in Afghanistan to help maintain peace during the reconciliation period.

It is in any case very useful to promote now inter-Afghan dialogue, as it is possible in the present situation, thinking ahead on how to build a stable and peaceful Afghanistan. Follow-up meetings will promote further Informal discussions among Afghans (with some participation of non-Afghans). These meetings will be organized in the future in various places. The ideas discussed in those meetings will then be conveyed to the various authorities (the Afghan government, political parties and groups, the Taliban movement leadership, groups allied with the Taliban, etc.). Hence participants to the meetings, who will in any case speak as individuals and express their personal opinions, should nevertheless be closely connected to their authorities.

Also it will be useful to have other meetings where the participants will come from the region surrounding Afghanistan to discuss how other countries can help in guaranteeing the stability of Afghanistan and in preventing any external interference.

.....

Pugwash (Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs) is an independent International organization - not associated with any specific Government - that promotes dialogue and peace in several critical areas. Pugwash began its activities in 1957, addressing the issue of nuclear weapons and the dangers that they constitute to mankind. In 1995 Pugwash and its founder Joseph Rotblat got the Nobel Peace Prize. See www.pugwash.org.