

National and International Processes on Afghanistan:

HRD+ Statement on the Criteria for Civil Society Participation

Recently, groups under the name of civil society and individuals as representatives of civil society have been engaged in negotiations and interactions with international institutions and de-facto administration, both inside and outside Afghanistan. These efforts have intensified specifically with the approach of the new round of United Nations meetings in Doha.

Civil society, which acts as a bridge between the country's citizens and national and international systems, has a series of accepted criteria that should never be deviated from. Human Rights Defenders Plus (HRD+) outlines the below criteria for civil society in important events concerning the future of Afghanistan as:

- **Civil society is not a political institution and should not be used for the goals of political groups:** Civil society can advocate on behalf of the country's citizens for improving conditions within national and global political structures. Inclusion of civil society in any political misuse is contrary to the norms of this valuable institution.
- **Civil society is a people-driven entity whose legitimacy comes from citizen formations:** No institution should misuse this valuable legitimacy to support any political or economic interests of their group or individual.
- **Institutions or representatives of civil society should have collective backing from other civil institutions** and should attend events as a result of constructive negotiations and dialogues with other civil institutions.
- **Civil society's proposals in significant gatherings should be based on human rights values, particularly the rights of Afghan women:** Women's participation in all political, economic, social, and cultural matters should become a fundamental precondition for civil society. Women should be invited to important national and international events concerning Afghanistan without any discrimination, and their meaningful role in all affairs should be observed.
- **The rule of law, a lawful modern national state, should be the most important principle in any agenda for civil society:** Legitimacy is a prerequisite for effective civil society, and without it, society regresses.
- **Respect for the position of citizens' rights, especially for vulnerable groups, and the principal of an inclusive system are unchangeable values for Afghan civil society** and should be highlighted in important international discussions.

- **Transparency, accountability, democracy, and access to information should become core values and working tools for civil society institutions in advocacy events.** Civil society representatives should inform all citizens of their actions and be transparent and accountable for their actions. HRD+ demands transparency in international processes regarding Afghanistan. Key transparency issues can be achieved through constructive dialogues with representatives of civil society, human rights defenders, and the media. Additionally, the agenda and outcomes of the national and international events should be transparently communicated to the citizens. This is important as most events concerning Afghanistan are often held behind closed doors.
- **Civil society institutions are not profit-making structures:** These institutions obtain certain costs for their value-based activities. However, civil society should not engage in profit-making programs, and any economic transactions are against the norms of this value-driven institution. Therefore, individuals or institutions involved in pure economic matters have no right to represent civil society in important events.
- **Representing civil society in events is not a privilege but a serious mission:** Thus, knowledgeable, understanding, responsible, and reputable individuals should attend these events, considering the above points, and be the voice of our voiceless citizens.
- **Misuse of the name and representation of civil society, especially in multilateral political meetings, leads to the tarnishing, weakening, and gradual collapse of civil society and its lasting values:** Civil society members and activists are independent and non-governmental individuals, and the principle of independence of civil institutions is the basis of society's trust in these institutions. Therefore, all political, governmental, and commercial individuals are expected to respect this principle and assist in the sustainability of civil society and provide a platform for the reflection of its real representatives.

HRD+ urges all civil society institutions and human rights defenders to adhere to these criteria in their participation in national and international events.

HRD+ requests all national and international institutions organizing important events concerning Afghanistan to strictly adhere to the criteria mentioned in this statement.

HRD+ requests all national and international media to observe the content of this statement in their reporting and analysis of the role of civil society.

**In solidarity with all civil society activist and their invaluable role of for a better future of
Afghanistan**

Human Rights Defender Plus (HRD+)