

Afghan, Pakistani Women Push for Role in Peace Talks

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Prominent women rights defenders from Afghanistan and Pakistan have jointly called on their governments to push for the inclusion of women in any peace negotiations aimed at easing bilateral tensions and resolving an increasingly deadly Afghan conflict.

The two countries share a nearly 2,600-kilometer border, and landlocked Afghanistan relies mostly on Pakistani transit routes and ports for international trade.

Tensions in relations have undermined bilateral economic and political ties, however, because of allegations that Islamabad covertly supports the Taliban sustain the Afghan insurgency.

Pakistani officials deny the charges. In recent months, Pakistan repeatedly has closed border crossings with Afghanistan, alleging the neighboring country is sheltering militants and helping them in plotting attacks against Pakistan.



A boy stands at the closed Chaman border crossing between Pakistan and Afghanistan with trucks seen stranded in the background.

The unilateral border closure has added to the woes of war-hit Afghans and their business, according to traders on both sides.

Kabul dismisses accusations it is behind a recent spike in terrorist attacks in Pakistan.



Hospital workers push a stretcher carrying the body of a policeman who was one of the policemen shot dead in Quetta, Pakistan, July 13, 2017.

While official dialogue has failed to improve rampant mistrust and suspicion-marred ties, members of an Afghan women's delegation visiting Islamabad to meet with their Pakistani counterparts are emphasizing the need to include women leaders in the peace-building efforts.

Need to include women

They say the Afghan war and tensions between the two countries are mainly hurting women and children on both sides of the border, but their problems have not been properly assessed and addressed.

"So far only men have been involved in the peace process between Afghanistan and Pakistan, and they have not achieved the desired results," said Gul Maki Sultanzada, a lawyer by profession who hails from Afghanistan's southern Kandahar province.

"It is now imperative to include women in the peace process, talks and negotiations. And for this purpose the empowerment of women is a vital prerequisite and the two governments need to urgently address this gap," she noted.

Pakistani rights activist, Tahira Abdullah, acknowledges bilateral relations lately have worsened, but she says women's participation in any renewed peace initiative could help reverse the trend.

“If any kind of peace process is going to happen in Afghanistan, and between Pakistan and Afghanistan, it will not happen without the inclusion, the participation and the inputs of women. There will be no peace without it,” Abdullah observed.



The Kabul government alleges that Taliban insurgents use sanctuaries in Pakistan to plot attacks in Afghanistan. These are charges Islamabad strongly rejects, instead blaming the Afghan intelligence agency for sheltering and aiding anti-Pakistan militants.

Critics say that with the Taliban refusing to engage in peace talks with the Afghan government and instead inflaming insurgent activists in the country, there is virtually no chance of a peace process taking root in the foreseeable future.

The stalemate, observers say, will continue to be a stumbling block in any attempt aimed at normalizing relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan.