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# Afghans call on David Cameron and Ashraf Ghani to reform Afghanistan's trillion-dollar natural resource sector

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More than forty Afghan and international organizations warned David Cameron and Afghan President Ashraf Ghani that Afghanistan's trillion dollar natural resource sector could fund conflict and humanitarian crises if not governed properly, days before the duo host the first major international conference on Afghanistan since its new government was elected.

In **letters to Cameron and Ghani**, the organisations expressed their "great concern" at the "threat posed to the country's future development and stability by poor governance of natural resources" and asked them to put the sector on the top of the agenda at the **London Conference on Afghanistan on Thursday**. Large-scale illegal mining in Afghanistan continues to fund armed groups, including the Taliban and informal militias implicated in human rights abuses.

"Much hope has been invested in oil, gas, and mining to drive economic growth and development in Afghanistan and provide a source of government revenue," the signatory wrote. "But as the experience of Afghanistan and other countries makes clear, there is a very great danger these resources will instead help fuel corruption and lead to another cycle of conflict and humanitarian crisis. As Afghanistan undertakes its first peaceful transition of power in a century, stronger natural resource governance is not a side issue: it is a critical precondition for the stability and prosperity we are all working for."

The Conference will bring together the international community and the new Afghan administration to set out a vision for reform and economic development. At the previous major conference two years ago, the Afghan government agreed to construct a framework to create accountable, efficient, and transparent mineral, gas, and oil sectors, but since then, reforms have largely stalled. A new minerals law enacted this summer failed to include several basic elements of international best practice, despite some positive provisions.

"David Cameron, as co-host of the London Conference, must step up and take the lead for the global community, as he did at the G8 last year. Britain has spent 13 years in Afghanistan and has paid a high price for its efforts. Now, when Afghanistan has an historic opportunity to pull itself out of decades of conflict, Cameron must support Afghanistan's government to get the reforms we need," said Sayed Ikram Afzali, head of the Afghan NGO Integrity Watch Afghanistan, one of the signatories of the letter.

The co-signatories are calling for the Afghan government and international donors to commit to robust legislation and policies that would protect Afghanistan's natural resource sector including greater transparency and oversight, improved community engagement and strengthened oversight of security at natural resource sites. Stronger resource governance has also been demanded by Afghan and international civil society organisations who are meeting tomorrow for the Ayenda conference on the fringes of the government discussions.

"Afghanistan faces a clear and present threat of conflict and corruption linked to natural resources," said Stephen Carter, head of the Afghanistan Campaign at Global Witness. "At a minimum, the Afghan government and its allies should be working together to put in place the basic protections which are increasingly part of best practice around the world. This conference is a key opportunity to do move that agenda forward, and we should not let this chance slip."

/ Ends

Notes to editors:

1. Letters to David Cameron and Ashraf Ghani can be found [here](#) and [here](#). The letter to Ghani is available in Dari [here](#).
2. For additional details on proposed reforms, see Global Witness, "Building for the Long-Term: Avoiding the Resource Curse in Afghanistan," February 2014, which can be found [here](#).
3. BAAG (British & Irish Agencies Afghanistan Group) will bring together over 200 professionals from leading Afghan and international charities, development and right organisations in the Ayenda Conference on December 3rd. (Ayenda is Dari for future). When the Ayenda Conference has agreed its recommendations, a two person delegation will attend the main London Conference on Afghanistan to present their findings to David Cameron, Ashraf Ghani and the other world leaders present.

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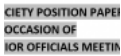
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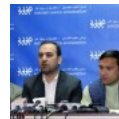
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