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Brussels Conference on Afghanistan: a commitment on extractives, but little on corruption.

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Integrity Watch Afghanistan and Global Witness welcome the inclusion of a commitment on extractive sector governance in the outcomes of the Brussels conference on Afghanistan taking place today, but are deeply concerned at the lack of specific commitments on corruption. The Afghan government and donors have made strong statement on fighting corruption in Afghanistan, but among the 24 commitments they have agreed in Brussels, there is only one that relates to corruption, in addition to the benchmark on extractives. That benchmark is relatively weak and unspecific, only calling for an anti-corruption strategy to be created and for ministries to report on implementation of anti corruption action plans.

"The only clear Afghan government commitment here is to draft and report on anti-corruption strategies, while the donors seem to have nothing to say on their role in fighting corruption," said Ikram Afzali, the Executive Director of Integrity Watch Afghanistan. "The Afghan people deserve commitments which create genuine accountability from both sides to address a problem which is absolutely at the heart of insecurity and the lack of development in Afghanistan."

In collaboration with other anti-corruption CSOs, Global Witness and Integrity Watch produced a series of recommendations on anti-corruption benchmarks for inclusion in the Brussels outcomes. Of these, only the recommendation on extractives has been included.

"Given the strong statements made by donors and the government on the need to fight corruption, we are puzzled and disappointed that the concrete commitments they have made to each other and to their people contain so little of substance," said Stephen Carter, the head of the Afghanistan team at Global Witness. "We understand the challenge facing the Afghan government, and recognise the efforts they have made, but this risks calling into question their determination to protect against corruption – and the determination of the donors to protect their taxpayers."

The lack of commitments at Brussels does not prevent the government and donors from acting. Integrity Watch Afghanistan and Global Witness are calling on the government to work with civil society to put in place a full set of reforms to make up for the lack of specific commitments on broader anti-corruption measures – and to strengthen enforcement of the laws that do exist.

"We ask for civil society to be given a substantive role in developing anti-corruption reforms within the High Council on Governance, and to be included in the high-level working committees to implement anti-corruption plans within ministers," Afzali said. "If key reforms are not going to be set out in Brussels, then the responsibility of the government and donors to act quickly and robustly is greater than ever."

However, both Integrity Watch and Global Witness warmly welcomed the government's commitment to submit amendments to the Afghan mining law, including publication of contracts as a condition of their validity, and identification of the real, beneficial owners of mining companies. "The government has now made a positive commitment to specific reforms," Carter said. "As always, implementation will be the test – but we look forward to working with them to prevent abuses and corruption in the extractive sector which are fuelling conflict, funding armed groups on a massive scale, and robbing the Afghan treasury and people of hundreds of millions of dollars."

Notes to editors:

1. The full text of the deliverables agreed at Brussels under the Self-Reliance Through Mutual Accountability Framework (SMAF) can be found here: [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-summit/2016/10/AGREED-SMAF-SMART-Deliverables-FINAL-_pdf\(1\)/](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-summit/2016/10/AGREED-SMAF-SMART-Deliverables-FINAL-_pdf(1)/)

Deliverable No. 2 on anti-corruption reads: *Anti-corruption strategy for the whole of government drafted and endorsed by the High Council on Rule of Law and Anti-corruption in the first half of 2017 and implementation initiated in the second half of 2017. Five revenue-generating ministries publicly report on implementation progress of their anti-corruption action plans in 2017. [sic]*

Deliverable No. 12 on extractives reads:

To operationalize the government's commitment to the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), amendments to the Mining Law submitted to the parliament include measures such as publication of mining contracts, identification of the mining contracts beneficial ownership, assignment of mineral rights for funding of mining project suspension for Force Majeure, rights of private land owners' enforcement of mining contracts being linked to their publication, by first half 2018 and the mineral fiscal regime developed by 2018. [sic]

1. Integrity Watch Afghanistan, Global Witness, Transparency International, and the Open Contracting Partnership jointly produced a briefing and set of recommendations on possible anti-corruption benchmarks for the Brussels conference. For a copy, see: <https://www.globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/afghanistan/civil-society-anti-corruption-recommendations-2016-brussels-conference-afghanistan/>
2. Integrity Watch Afghanistan and Global Witness produced a focused briefing and suggested benchmarks on extractive sector governance. For a copy, see <https://www.globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/afghanistan/extractives-policy-briefing-2016-brussels-conference-afghanistan/>
3. The Independent Joint Anti-Corruption Monitoring and Evaluation Committee (MEC), an autonomous anti-corruption body established by Presidential Decree, highlights shortcomings in the revised SMAF in relation to corruption. For their statement, see [http://www.mec.af/files/2016_09_28_MEC_Press_Release_on_SMAF_Deliverables_\(English\).pdf](http://www.mec.af/files/2016_09_28_MEC_Press_Release_on_SMAF_Deliverables_(English).pdf)
4. At the London Conference on Anti-Corruption, the Afghan government committed to several reforms, including the creation of a public register of beneficial ownership, listing the real individuals behind companies. For details, see https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/522697/Afghanistan.pdf
5. The 24 revised SMAF commitments supersede an original set of 39 short-term SMAF deliverables agreed by senior Afghan and international officials in September 2015. Most of these had an anti-corruption element, either directly or indirectly. For a copy of the September 2015 commitments, see <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/files/000102254.pdf>
6. A recent Transparency International report found that only 2 of 22 major anti-corruption commitments made by the Afghan government since 2014 had been fully implemented. See https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/522697/Afghanistan.pdf

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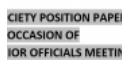
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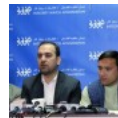
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