

## **Preface**

This book is based on my MA thesis completed in November 2015. My research focuses on Afghan reconciliation processes, especially the Afghan National Reconciliation Policy - a process that was initiated during my father's regime - when he was the President of Afghanistan.

The desire to pen down this book began as a journey to steer through the difficult experiences life had offered me. The exercise of writing about reconciliation has been a calling since the assassinations of my father and uncle, who were brutally killed on 27<sup>th</sup> September 1996 and their bodies hanged for almost two days on display.

Twenty years ago, I was the second one in my family after my sister Onai to have watched the graphic images of my father and uncle hanging. Besides not being able to breath while I watched their hanging bodies, what stunned me is the large number of people assembled around their hanging bodies, watching silently what was on display, while some Taliban soldiers were embracing and saluting each other. I wondered how could people witness such a gruesome act of violence or for that matter, embrace, laugh and share greetings? I asked myself whether I, as a human being, would be able to witness beaten up, wounded and bloody corpses? I could not answer that question to myself at age 18 and that violent inhuman act numbed me.

The numbness helped me survive and perhaps take the first steps towards the journey of writing this book. I wanted to understand why my father and uncle were killed and what had they done to deserve such an ending? I clearly remember meeting people who were with my father or visited him in the UN compound. Amidst those encounters I remember meeting the UN Secretary General Kofi Annan with my mother, no one was able to give satisfactory answers as to what happened the night my father and uncle were killed or who killed them? I remember my mother asking Mr. Annan that since my father was in the UN premises, his family would like to ask the UN for an investigation. However, the answer to her request was that our allocated meeting time was up.

It was at that juncture that I decided to find the truth myself so I started investigating on my own. In understanding Afghanistan, its politics and history, I

read my father's letters constantly and took note of his sincere efforts to bring peace in Afghanistan. In years to follow, I found literature in Dari and Pashto covering the National Reconciliation Policy that had been initiated under my father's regime. However, only a small portion of these publications was available in the mainstream English books that I came across in the bookstores and libraries in India or Europe. Books that spoke of the Najibullah regime would often highlight the politics of Afghanistan within the Cold War or regional context but the notion of reconciliation remained secondary.

With time passing, I realized that I was lucky to have access to first-hand accounts of the Afghans leaders who worked in his government on issues of the National Reconciliation Policy. My interaction with many of his colleagues highlighted the discrepancies and the misconceptions that existed on the genuine attempts of the Afghan government to pursue a national reconciliation.

In 2012, when I started studying at the Swisspeace Academy and the Innsbruck University, my understanding of reconciliation, based on my own experiences and those shared by my father's colleagues, matured further. I came across literature by Wolfgang Dietrich, John Paul Lederach, Johan Galtung, Virginia Satir, Elise Boulding, Carl Rogers, Marshall Rosenberg and others that helped me understand that my search for truth is an opportunity to reconcile with my own past. Yet again, the National Reconciliation Policy pursued by my father's government introduced me to a new aspect of reconciliation i.e. social healing. My attempt to find the truth had eventually led me to heal my own wounds.

My relationship with my father and uncle had taken me deeper to the study of reconciliation. Studying the reconciliation processes in Afghanistan has been a fascinating research subject in international relations, history and geopolitics but in the relatively new field of peace studies as well. The Afghan reconciliations in 1986 and 2010 allowed me to decipher that the crucial component of the process are the common Afghans themselves, in other words the peace process in Afghanistan is yet to become people centric.

Since four decades of war in Afghanistan, the people of my country have witnessed peace deals, agreements and until now two reconciliation processes. I am often touched when Afghans recall my father's speeches and hold him and his

government in high esteem for their peace efforts. While pursuing my research, I have tried to understand what made the National Reconciliation Policy different from the Afghan Peace and Reintegration Program or the peace deals that were signed during the civil war of 1992-1996. In addition, I highlighted the loopholes that the National Reconciliation Policy comprised.

As I was commemorating my father and uncle's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary with my family last September, what made the news in Afghanistan was the peace agreement signed with the Hizb-e-Islami of Gulbuddin Hikamatyar. The peace agreement was signed with the leadership of the government, emissaries of the High Peace Council and the representatives of the Hizb-e-Islami with its leader delivering a broadcast message from Pakistan. Meanwhile, the media covered the civilian demonstrations on the streets, which had gathered to express their disagreement. The peace agreement was yet another reminder as to how the reconciliation processes lack people centric practices. The civil society organisations in Afghanistan as well as UNAMA have pointed out, through their research and papers, that Afghanistan more than ever needs a people driven peace process. In my book, I strive to get the message across to the reader that reconciliation in Afghanistan can be sustainable when its people are also given the opportunity to own the process and heal.

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