

History of the Vienna Process for a Democratic Afghanistan

The Taliban's resurgence on August 15, 2021, destroyed the hopes that had been growing for a democratic and peaceful Afghanistan. The people of Afghanistan are once again facing a severe political, economic, social, and humanitarian crisis marked by human rights violations, poverty, oppression, and fear. The political and social systems established over the previous two decades, with the support of the international community, collapsed under the Taliban's regime. This so-called regime, led primarily by Taliban police forces, is characterized by cruelty, incompetence, and hostility, particularly toward women and minorities.

In response to this crisis, the Vienna Process emerged as a vital platform for Afghan democrats in exile. Its roots trace back to the Austrian Relief Committee for Afghanistan (ARC), which from 1980 to 1994 supported numerous humanitarian projects for Afghans in both Pakistan and Afghanistan. This long-standing commitment to Afghan welfare provided the foundation for the Vienna Process initiative.

Key figures in the creation of the Vienna Process include Mr. Nur Safa, an Afghan-born former Austrian diplomat and coordinator of the ARC in Pakistan, and his wife, Ms. Fahima Zahma, a human rights activist. They were joined by Professor Christian Reder, former head of the ARC, who had been actively involved in Afghan affairs for over 45 years and had authored books such as *Afghanistan Fragmented* and *Noch Jahre der Unruhe*, (More years of unrest) on the history of Afghanistan. Their collective experience and passion for Afghan democracy led them to support the Afghan exile community in mobilizing for solutions to the ongoing crisis.

The RD-Foundation Vienna, founded in 2011 by Professor Dr. Reder and his wife Ingrid Reder, provided the necessary resources for these efforts. The foundation, which focuses on research, development, and human rights, supports various civil society projects in Austria, also including the publication of Afghan books and the Silk Way Online Platform, which serves as an important voice for Afghan democrats in exile.

To further advance the Vienna Process, key figures Ms. Manizaha Bakhtari, Afghanistan's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to Austria, and Dr. Wolfgang Petritsch, a former Austrian diplomat and head of the Austrian Institute for International Affairs, joined the initiative. The Austrian Institute, founded in 1979, is dedicated to fundamental research in international politics and plays a leading role in analyzing political and social developments on a global scale.

As the first step, the founders reached out to leaders of the National Resistance Front and the Freedom Front, both of which had been at the forefront of Afghanistan's resistance movements in the Hindu Kush and Pamir Mountains. The National Resistance Front was the first to respond positively to the invitation.

The outreach efforts were expanded to include a wide range of political parties, organizations, influential figures, civil society activists, intellectuals, women, religious and ethnic minorities, and human rights organizations. These

efforts culminated in the establishment of the Vienna Process for a Democratic Afghanistan, which seeks to provide a comprehensive and inclusive solution to the ongoing crisis and lay the foundation for a new political structure in Afghanistan.