SIDE EVENT REPORT

ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN OPERATIONALIZING THE INDEPENDENT INVESTIGATIVE MECHANISM FOR AFGHANISTAN (IIMA)

A hybrid side event at the margins of the 63rd Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council

8 September 2026 | 12:00-13:00 CET | Room XI | Geneve UNHRC

The side event highlighted Afghan civil society's vital role in advancing accountability, supporting victims, protecting rights, and strengthening transitional justice through the IIMA.



1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The side event [1]examined the role of Afghan civil society in operationalizing the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Afghanistan (IIMA) during the 63rd session of the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in Geneva. The discussion brought together civil society representatives, human rights experts, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, and an audience participant to consider how the mechanism can contribute to documentation, accountability, victim support, and a broader transitional justice process.

Throughout the discussion, speakers emphasized that the establishment of the mechanism should be understood as the beginning of a longer-term process. Its credibility and effectiveness were linked to its independence and transparency, as well as to meaningful and sustained civil society participation, victim- and survivor-centered approaches, the protection of human rights defenders, accessibility, and coordination with existing documentation and accountability efforts.

Speakers also stressed that justice in Afghanistan cannot be reduced to criminal prosecution alone. The discussion highlighted the need to address the country's longer history of conflict and multiple forms of harm, including gender-based violence and socioeconomic consequences. It also underscored the importance of reparations, truth-seeking, guarantees of non-recurrence, and the meaningful inclusion of marginalized communities.



2. PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE SIDE EVENT

- Examine how Afghan civil society can meaningfully participate in the operationalization of the IIMA.
- Identify key expectations emerging from civil society consultations and the Civil Society Forum.

[1] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0QdvfGA03bo

- Discuss how the IIMA can complement existing UN human rights documentation and accountability mechanisms.
- Consider what comprehensive and victim-centered justice should mean in the Afghan context.
- Identify risks faced by civil society organizations, human rights defenders, women-led organizations, victims, and survivors when engaging with accountability processes.
- Discuss ways to reach marginalized and affected communities that have historically been excluded from justice and accountability processes.

3. KEY DISCUSSION THEMES

3.1 Independence, Transparency and Credibility

Speakers repeatedly emphasized that the IIMA should operate independently, impartially and transparently. Transparency was discussed in relation to priorities, working methods, staffing, recruitment, leadership, budget and the structure of the mechanism. These issues were presented as important to building confidence among civil society, victims and survivors.

3.2 Civil Society as a Partner, Not Only a Source of Evidence

A central message was that civil society should be engaged throughout the life of the mechanism. This includes strategy development, setting priorities, outreach, documentation, evidence sharing, referrals, accountability pathways and follow-up. The discussion called for sustained engagement rather than one-time consultations.

3.3 Victim- and Survivor-Centered Justice

Victims and survivors were described as partners and rights-holders whose experiences and needs should shape the process. The discussion emphasized safety, meaningful participation, recognition, access to remedies and attention to long-term consequences of conflict.

3.4 Building on Existing Documentation

Participants stressed that the mechanism should not begin from zero. Existing Afghan and international documentation, archives and previous reporting should be reviewed and used, with coordination among civil society organizations, UN mechanisms, international human rights organizations and victims' groups.

3.5 Accessibility and Safe Engagement

The physical location of the mechanism should not prevent Afghan civil society, victims, survivors and human rights defenders from participating. Speakers called for practical and secure online and in-person channels, including ways for people inside Afghanistan to engage safely.

3.6 Afghan Expertise and Meaningful Participation

The discussion called for Afghan women and men with relevant expertise to have meaningful roles in the mechanism and its processes. This was linked to understanding Afghanistan's context, diversity and lived realities.

3.7 Comprehensive Historical Scope

Speakers discussed the importance of examining Afghanistan's longer conflict history rather than limiting accountability to a single period, government or armed group. A comprehensive approach was presented as relevant to understanding patterns, root causes and continuing harm.

3.8 Gender-Based and Socioeconomic Harm

Sexual and gender-based violence, economic losses, disability, psychosocial harm, displacement and other consequences were identified as important dimensions of justice. The discussion stressed that reparations should address practical and long-term needs rather than being understood only as one-time compensation.

3.9 Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Documenters

Participants emphasized that people who document violations may face retaliation and detention. Protection was therefore described as a necessary component of meaningful engagement with accountability mechanisms.

3.10 Transitional Justice Beyond Prosecution

The IIMA was discussed as part of a wider transitional justice framework. The speakers referred to truth, reparations, guarantees of non-recurrence and possible future criminal proceedings, rather than treating prosecution as the only form of justice.

3.11 Trust, Political Will and International Support

Trust between Afghan civil society and international accountability institutions was identified as essential. Speakers also emphasized the need for political will, sustained support and concrete action from international actors.

4. SPEAKER PERSPECTIVES

Abdullah Ahmadi: Civil Society Priorities

Ahmadi presented the establishment of the mechanism as the result of sustained advocacy by Afghan civil society and other stakeholders. He summarized five priorities emerging from consultations: independence and transparency; continuous civil society participation; placing victims and survivors at the center; building on existing documentation; and ensuring accessibility. He also called for a written policy governing meaningful engagement with civil society, human rights defenders and victim representatives.

Negina Yari: Sustained Engagement and Afghan Ownership

Yari highlighted the consultation work undertaken through calls for input, online exchanges and the Civil Society Forum. She emphasized transparency, independence, broad

accessibility and the inclusion of Afghan expertise. She also called for sustained communication, joint advocacy, political will and solidarity expressed through concrete action.

Richard Bennett: Complementarity and Accountability Pathways

Bennett focused on the relationship between the IIMA and existing UN human rights work. He described opportunities for information sharing and coordination and stressed the role of civil society in shaping the mechanism's strategy. He also discussed the importance of a comprehensive approach, trust, and the need for mechanisms to connect evidence with possible future accountability processes.

Huma Saeed: Comprehensive and Victim-Centered Justice

Saeed emphasized that justice should address different periods of Afghanistan's conflict, multiple forms of harm and the long-term needs of victims. She highlighted reparations, psychosocial and socioeconomic consequences, gender-based violence, safe evidence collection and the inclusion of children, persons with disabilities and other marginalized groups.

Zarqa Yaftali: Participation and Protection

Yaftali emphasized that civil society, especially women-led organizations, should be treated as partners. She stressed the importance of women's participation and the need to protect people who document violations. She also raised concerns about the responsibilities of international actors and the need for consistent application of human rights principles.

Artemis: Marginalized Communities and Long-Term Strategy

Artemis highlighted the need to connect the mechanism to a longer-term transitional justice strategy and asked how it can reach communities that are often excluded from accountability processes, including people with disabilities and LGBTQ people.

5. AREAS FOR FOLLOW-UP IDENTIFIED IN THE DISCUSSION

- Develop a clear and written framework for meaningful engagement between the IIMA and Afghan civil society.
- Ensure civil society and victim representatives participate in the development of the mechanism's strategy and priorities.
- Establish secure and accessible channels for engagement with people inside and outside Afghanistan.
- Create appropriate protection measures for human rights defenders, documenters, victims, survivors and other people who cooperate with the mechanism.
- Review and build upon existing documentation and archives and strengthen coordination with relevant UN and international mechanisms.
- Ensure meaningful participation of Afghan women and men with relevant expertise and experience.
- Develop approaches that can safely reach marginalized and affected communities, including children and persons with disabilities.

- Maintain attention to sexual and gender-based violence and socioeconomic harms as components of a comprehensive justice framework.
- Strengthen communication and coordination among civil society organizations inside Afghanistan, in the diaspora and internationally.
- Support a broader transitional justice approach that connects evidence collection with truth, reparations, guarantees of non-recurrence and appropriate accountability pathways.

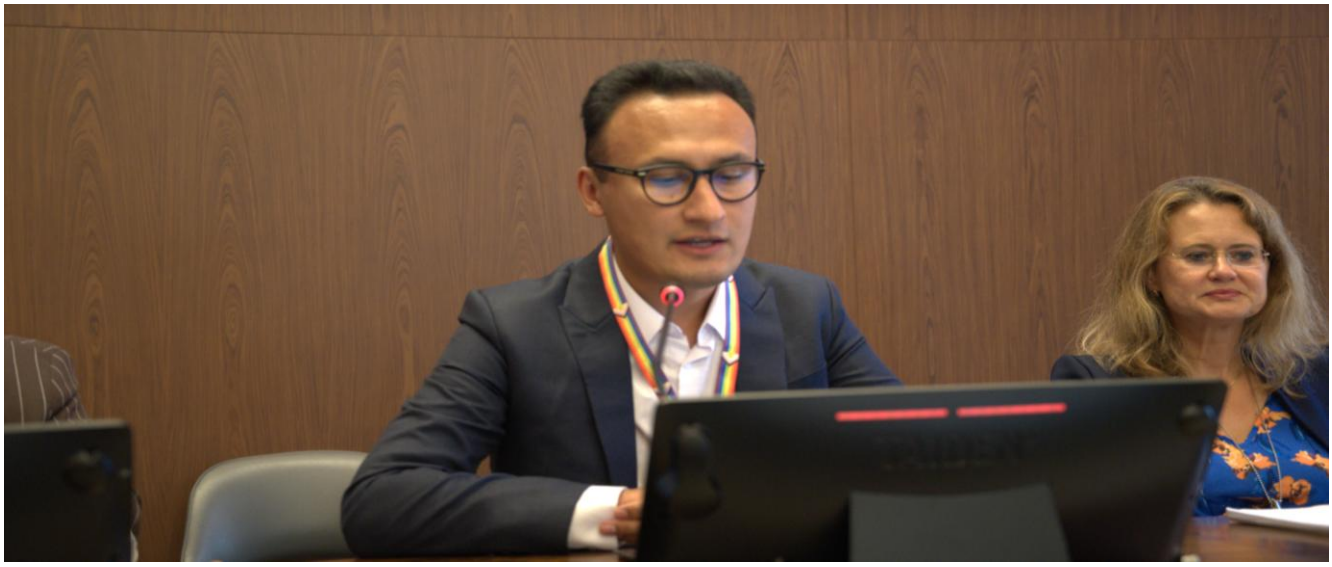
6. SIDE-EVENT PHOTO GALLERY






ABDULLAH AHMADI


NEGINA YARI
RICHARD BENNETT



7. CONCLUSION

The side event underscored that the operationalization of the IIMA is not only an institutional or investigative task. Participants consistently linked its effectiveness to the quality of its relationship with Afghan civil society, victims, survivors and human rights defenders.

The discussion placed particular emphasis on partnership, trust, protection, accessibility and inclusion. It also situated the mechanism within a broader understanding of justice that extends beyond prosecution to documentation, truth, reparations, guarantees of non-recurrence and attention to the diverse and long-term harms experienced by people affected by conflict.

A recurring message across the interventions was that civil society is prepared to contribute its documentation, experience and expertise, while seeking meaningful participation in shaping the mechanism's priorities and strategy. The next phase therefore requires sustained engagement, practical safeguards, coordination and continued attention to the voices of those most affected by Afghanistan's conflict.