

## ANBP SUCCESS STORIES: FOCUS ON PEACE, DEVELOPMENT AND REFORMED COMMANDERS

### DIAG Story from Bagram

#### **I am Fighting Jihad for Peace and Work, says former Commander**

*Bagram is a district of Parwan province in the north of Kabul which until a few years back was known for a heavy presence of Illegal Armed Groups (IAGs) and illegal weapons. Today, the town is known for peace and security and many former commanders have turned a new leaf, away from guns and in search of a new life.*

#### **Text By Wahidullah Amani. Photos By Fahim Hamdard**

Sayed Karim, 46, a tall and stoutly well-built Bagram local, cuts an impressive figure with his characteristic Pashtun turban. A former Jehadi commander who led 300 armed men in fighting the Russians as part of the Jamiat party, Karim is now a full-time farmer, having surrendered his weapons to the programme for Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG). "Times have changed radically", says Karim. "I joined Jihad when I was just 16 and in those days I was very proud of fighting against the Russians. Even when one of my friends died we bore the loss with courage and pride. Those days are over and today, I'm very happy because peace seems very possible".

Karim owns 20 acres land which he uses for wheat and grape farming. "I have 4 sons and 5 daughters. My 2 sons and 3 daughters are at school and with the grace of God I am able to provide for their education. Having been a foot soldier of *Jihad or the holy war for the better part of his adult life, Karim holds forth on the real purpose of Jihad.* "There are two kinds of *Jihad, Jihad-e-Akbar* (Arabic word with meaning of big *Jihad*) and *Jihad-e-Asghar* (Arabic word with meaning of small *Jihad*). *Jihad-e-Asghar* is about *Jihad* against the enemy. *Jihad-e-Akbar* is the *Jihad* against immorality and vice. *Jihad-e-Akbar* is more important than *Jihad-e-Asghar*. If my children grow up illiterate and waste their lives fighting, without realizing why and who they are fighting, then, it means, they have left *Jihad-e-Akbar* and are doing just *Jihad-e-Asghar*".

Karim feels that the international community must not leave Afghanistan until they keep their promises of defeating the terrorists and reconstruction of the country, both of which have not been full completed yet. "Peace really is the only key to development", says Karim. "In peace everyone can live the way they want. A Hindu can practice his Hinduism, Muslim can practice Islam and a Christian his Christian faith".

Shir Aqa, another former Jehadi commander who handed over his weapons to DIAG, says that for 30 years as a Jehadi commander and a man on the move, the only thing he loved was his gun. "Back then nothing except the gun was of interest to me", says Aqa. "However, when I handed over my guns to DIAG two years ago, I realized I had begun to connect with my family and children for the first time". He says the joys of family life made him realize how mis-directed his goals had been for all those years when he was away from the family. "I never knew how joyful it is to live life with my children and family", says Aqa. For years I did not even think of



my children and even though I am still looking for decent work and wages, I have a happy life with my children”

The UNDP-supported DIAG programme is not merely limited to weapons collection. It is providing development projects to those districts that are declared “peace districts” following a rigorous assessment of the weapons surrendered in the district. In Bagram, the DIAG development project is helping dig over 70 wells to provide clean drinking water to several villages in the district. Work on this project is ongoing and out of the 74 wells promised for the district, 39 are already functional. Nargis, a resident of Bagram, says that the wells have made a real difference to her quality of life. “Earlier, I was using river water for all household needs, even for drinking purposes but now



with the well in my neighbourhood, the quality and supply of water for my family have improved vastly”, says Nargis.

Bagram district governor Kabir Ahmad Rahil says that he is happy with the pace of security and reconstruction in his district. His main concern is the joblessness of the youth in Bagram. According to Rahil Bagram has seen a high influx of returnees due to a stable peace and security situation in the district. But this has led to high levels of unemployment as there just is not enough work for everyone.



“Our people were really thirsty for peace, and that is why they welcomed the DIAG programme with one voice. These people are tired of fighting”, Rahil notes.

Nargis Marzi is a 36 year old woman who originally hails from Kabul and is married to a man from Bagram. When she came to Bagram four year ago she was very nervous and afraid because she could see men everywhere with guns. “Even young boys had weapons on their shoulders”, recalls Nargis. I was afraid to ever leave my home alone and was always escorted by a male family member and always in a Burqa. Even two years ago there were armed men stalking the streets in Bagram everywhere”, says Nargis.



Nargis feels the situation has changed remarkably in Bagram. She walks by herself, and is able to go to her job without any fear of illegal armed men lurking in the neighborhood. "Now those illegal armed men have been disbanded by DIAG. I am not afraid of them any more. I have a job with the local government and commuting to my job is not a problem" Nargis added.

*Nargis Marzi residents of Bagram*



### **"Peace Means I can bring Work for Women"**

Nargis is not the only one who has developed confidence in the peace and security situation in Bagram. Fifty-five years old Gulshirin from Bahadrkhil village of Bagram took advantage of the relatively stable security situation in the district and on her own established a women's collective with 75 participants. Every week, Gulshirin collects a small amount of cash from each woman member of the collective. The money is utilized for setting up micro projects for poor women such as bakery and tailoring. Gulshirin says this has been possible when there is peace

and security in the region.

"A few years ago because of the presence of illegal armed groups and illegal weapons I was not able to do anything for women. Now DIAG is implemented in our district and all illegal weapons are collected. We are happy and able to complete our activities without any fear of the gun."

Gulshirin said that there was a time in her district when almost everyone brandished a gun and people were using guns even to settle small issues. She narrates her brother's story who had come to her house from Kabul to visit her family and was killed in the cross-fire when two persons opened fire on each other in their village. She said: "My brother had come to my house when two persons opened fire on each other. My brother came out to negotiate with them to stop firing. He was shot and dead. I hate guns."

Her own son was carrying illegal guns and she was always worried when her son was going out with his gun. "I would pray to God for his safe return home", she says. "Since he handed over his gun to DIAG, I don't worry about where he is. I am not thinking of him now. I am sure that he won't be facing any problem as he has chosen to lead a normal life free of weapons." Gulshirin said.

***(Special Inputs from Shahrukh Mirza Nabizada)***

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