

President Toomas Hendrik Ilves visited the Afghan National Archive in Kabul today as part of his official visit to the country. The archive is one of Estonia's development cooperation partners in Afghanistan. During the visit he met with representatives of Afghan civil society organisations.

The Estonian head of state met with archive director Sakhi Muneer and the University of Kabul's Afghanistan Centre director Nancy Hatch-Dupree, with whom he discussed the projects that have been carried out so far as part of Estonia's development cooperation and ideas for the future.

To date, Estonia has worked with the University of Kabul to publish medical and business handbooks in both the Dari and Pashto languages, and the country was also involved in the creation of the website for the Afghan National Archive and the issuing of a publication showcasing the archive.

"We know what it means to start from scratch in building up a state," said President Ilves. "We know it can feel as though you're starting from nothing. That's why, if our experience can be of benefit to Afghanistan, we will be happy to share it with you."

The representatives of the civil society organisations who met with the president this afternoon in Kabul outlined their views of the current state of affairs in Afghanistan, nominating the lack of attention that is being paid to the development of a legal system that would help restore people's rights and sense of justice as the biggest problem facing their country.

"In a country with a complex past it's often difficult to clarify what civil society is and why it's so important," said President Ilves. "The work you're doing in the name of a better and more successful Afghanistan is absolutely vital."

In the evening, President Ilves and Estonia's chargé d'affaires ad interim in Afghanistan Tanel Sepp held a reception for the twenty or so Estonians working and serving in Kabul, including police officials, soldiers, election scrutineers and contracted workers.

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