

Women's innovation, creativity take center stage on World Intellectual Property Day

The United Nations agency behind [World Intellectual Property Day](#) is calling for greater participation of women in the field of innovation and creativity to reap maximum benefits for society.

“At present, [humanity is not realizing its full innovative and creative potential](#),” said Francis Gurry, the Director-General of the UN World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO).

“I call on everyone, everywhere, to ensure that we each do everything in our power to increase the full participation of women in innovation and creativity.”

According to WIPO, the number of women taking up leadership and senior roles in science, technology, business and the arts has increased.

For instance, in 1995, only 17 percent of international patent applications filed under WIPO's Patent Cooperation Treaty (PCT) system included a woman among the inventors listed.

A deficit in the participation of women means that the current levels of innovation and creativity are suboptimal, said Mr. Gurry, adding “we are simply not reaping the full benefits that flow from innovation and creativity.”

Better use of the potential offered by the full breadth of the society – including women and men – will help humanity address the radical challenges it confronts such as climate change, clean energy, food security and health, stressed the WIPO chief.

Marked annually on 26 April, World Intellectual Property Day highlights the role of intellectual property rights, such as patents, trademarks, industrial designs, and copyright, in spurring innovation and creativity.

Established in 1967, WIPO is a [self-funding specialized UN agency](#) that works for the development of a balanced and effective international intellectual property system and to enable innovation and creativity for the benefit of all.

It currently has 191 member States and is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland.

FEATURE: Young Afghans call for new focus on 'local peace' in a city surrounded by war

Sitting for green tea with Habiba Gulustani and her fellow activists provides a lesson in peace, conflict and patience. With her anxious six-year-old daughter spinning on her lap, she has the added disquiet of knowing that her city – Kunduz – was overrun in 2015 and again briefly in 2016 by insurgents, who still encircle the city. The few small airplanes that land here make a classic “corkscrew” landing – from a high altitude and quickly looping down – as a special precaution against potential ground fire.

“In the last five years, our hopes for peace have been dashed by war,” said Habiba, 32. “Earlier we had some optimism because of the dialogue established between local elders and insurgents. But right now, there is less talk of peace and not nearly enough security for making peace.”

Even with that, Habiba and a group of fellow activists in Kunduz say they are willing to continue to work for peace at a local level in a city often described by residents as a “Mini-Afghanistan” because of its diverse ethnic mix of Pashtun, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Tajik, Hazara, Arab, Uzbek, and Turkmen, among others. It is a city today that is at the centre of an incessant war, but one that is collectively searching for peace on every street corner.

In February, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani made an unprecedented and direct offer of peace talks with the largest anti-government force, the Taliban, who ruled the country until 2001. The offer – put forth at the “Kabul Process II” conference and discussed further by regional and international parties in Tashkent – raised hopes that peace has become not only a global concern, but also a top national priority, particularly in regions that have experienced the brunt of the conflict.

Peace activists and common citizens in Kunduz city, however, see the nation’s hopes for peace less on a national level and more through a local prism, including through their own steady efforts to reconcile and make peace from day to day.



UNAMA/PS

Habiba Gulustani and her daughter are anxious for peace.

Habiba recently spent several weeks with her group “Equality for Peace and Democracy,” interviewing “reconciled insurgents” who took up past offers to drop their armed struggle and return to their families and government-controlled territory.

“Local peace for them is essential, but I must say that most of the families we spoke to this past year, including to former insurgents, remain disappointed by the process thus far. They require more help with transitioning and also need to know they are safe from reprisals after they turn in their arms.”

For Habiba, the interviews she conducted highlighted the longer-term reconciliation needs that will have to be addressed as an Afghan peace deal with international backing takes shape. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan ([UNAMA](#)) has advocated for peace and reconciliation through events and media forums, including in Kunduz. More recently, President Ghani welcomed the UN role in future peace efforts, and 2018 is a year flush with fresh initiatives for peace.

In the last five years, our hopes for peace have been dashed by war – Habiba Gulustani

Residents here in Kunduz distinguish between “political peace,” which they see as a national priority, and a “social peace,” on a local level, which can address issues like women’s participation, long-term justice, and broader

reunification efforts after years of conflict.

“Seven years ago, when I first took a seat on the provincial peace committee, we worked on harmonizing peace on our own, and there wasn’t much international interest at all,” said Wahidullah Rahmani, 32, an activist, who this year launched a new peace initiative called the Kunduz Rescue Movement.

“During my work with the provincial peace committee, we helped take 500 fighters off the battlefield, but the whole effort fell apart over time. Our overall security in Kunduz has suffered as fighters have returned to the battle. Because Kunduz has been at the centre of the struggle, we fear that – if work for peace is not done now – we’ll be facing a much greater conflict in a year or two.”

Outside the city centre the conflict grinds on: Insurgents sustain themselves by taxing electricity lines and taking a cut from civil servant salaries, according to residents and local officials.

The Kunduz Rescue Movement is concentrating its efforts now on work that needs to be done to secure a lasting peace. “We want security improvements but also development, including new links to the outside world – as in a new airport. Peace will be a ‘local reality’ when we help to reduce the distance between people and the government. We can do this on our own but we also want and need more international support.”



UNAMA/PS

Young activist Zabihulla Majidi talks about the prospects for peace in Afghanistan.

The running conflict and constant uncertainty about the future has led to growing social problems, including a rash of drug addiction among the city's youth, according to locals.

"For the last three years we have lived under the constant fear that the city's defenses will collapse again," said Zabihulla Majidi, who advocates for peace along with Mr. Rahmani. "Recently, the situation has improved a bit, but there are not many new jobs, and young people are confused about their future and they are longing for peace."

As Habiba holds her daughter, she nods in agreement. Many young men in the region have tried to avoid the inevitability of fighting by fleeing as refugees through expensive and perilous human smuggling rackets. For women, such an escape from the realities of war is rarely an option.

"For the most part, women and girls don't have the possibility to leave – and that is why we are seeking a greater role in the peace effort."

UNAMA has a mandate to support the Government of Afghanistan and its citizens in a shared goal of becoming a stable, open, and peaceful nation. This feature piece is meant to tell a human interest story related to how Afghanistan and the UN are working together to overcome the many challenges to achieving this goal.

[Visiting Ethiopia, UN human rights chief urges new Government to 'keep positive momentum going'](#)

The United Nations human rights chief on Thursday expressed hope that Ethiopia continues its economic development where human rights are respected and people can freely speak their minds about public policies.

"We all want to see an Ethiopia with continuous economic development where all people benefit, and where people express their views on public policies, unafraid," said UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein at the end of his official visit to Ethiopia.

His visit followed the country's recent transition of power from the Government led by Hailemariam Desalegn, who abruptly resigned as prime minister in March, to the new one led by Abiy Ahmed.

A country with one of the fastest-growing economies in world, Ethiopia has also been riven by human rights violations and oppression on protests by those demanding equality.

[“Moments of transition](#) are rarely ever smooth. Ethiopia has struggled with a heavy history, but it has the wisdom of a tolerant, vibrant, youthful population to harness,” said Mr. Zeid, encouraging the authorities to keep the positive momentum going and to keep translating the inspiring words in the Prime Minister’s inaugural address into action.

Mr. Zeid was referring to the Prime Minister’s recognition that there is a “need to address existing inequities that led to recent unrest,” that “democracy cannot be realised in the absence of rights – be it civil or economic rights” and that the “right of people to express opinions, rights of people to organise themselves and engage in effective dialogue and participate in the governance system is inherent in our humanity...not for any government to bestow...as it sees fit.”

The UN rights chief also welcomed the release of a large number of people, including bloggers, political opponents and others who had been detained in relation to their participation in protests and their criticism of the Government.

“There was tremendous hope, but also anxiety,” he said, citing the words of a former political detainee, who said: “we have repeatedly been victims of broken promises.”

In this 70th anniversary year of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, when too many leaders risk reversing hard-won human rights gains, we look to Ethiopia to continue to give cause for optimism and hope – *UN rights chief*

During a visit to the Oromia region, Mr. Zeid met with the regional authorities and the traditional leaders, known as the Aba Gadas, who he said spoke about how they will continue to push for the truth to be told about what has happened over the past few years, including deaths during protests.

“They demanded investigations and accountability for excessive use of force by the authorities. They expressed their desire for justice and human rights for all Ethiopians and for their voices to be heard without fear of reprisal,” Mr. Zeid said.

On Wednesday, the UN Human Rights Office for East Africa and the Ethiopian Government signed an agreement to strengthen the Office’s ability to do human rights work in the country and the region.

The Office has already offered its assistance in revising the charities and societies proclamation, the anti-terrorism legislation and the mass media laws.

“In this 70th anniversary year of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, when too many leaders risk reversing hard-won human rights gains, we look to Ethiopia to continue to give cause for optimism and hope,” Mr. Zeid said.

[One in four thyroid cancer cases registered near Chernobyl site likely caused by radiation exposure – new UN study](#)

A quarter of all thyroid cancer cases among patients who were children at the time of the Chernobyl accident 32 years ago, are “probably” due to high doses of radiation received during and after the event, the United Nations body reviewing the effects of atomic radiation on human health and the environment has said.

About 20,000 thyroid cancer cases were registered from 1991 to 2015 among people who were under 18 in 1986 and lived in the affected areas of the former Soviet Union, according to the [latest study](#) by the UN Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation (UNSCEAR), which was released ahead of [International Chernobyl Disaster Remembrance Day](#).

The Committee now estimates that one in four of those cases is attributable to radiation exposure.

“Thyroid cancer is a major problem after the Chernobyl accident and needs further investigation to better understand the long-term consequences,” said UNSCEAR Chair Hans Vanmarcke.

The explosion at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant on 26 April 1986 spread a radioactive cloud over large parts of what was then the Soviet Union, now the territories of Belarus, Ukraine and Russia. Nearly 8.4 million people in these areas were exposed to the radiation.

Around 116,000 people were evacuated from the area at the time, and a further 230,000 in recent years.

On 8 December 2016 the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution designating 26 April as International Chernobyl Disaster Remembrance Day.

[At Security Council, UN chief calls](#)

for 'quantum leap' in funding activities to prevent conflict, address root causes

Peacebuilding and sustaining peace require a more coherent United Nations strategy, as well a 'quantum leap' in funding activities that prevent the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of conflict, [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) said Wednesday.

"This is first and foremost about enhancing our strategic coherence to support efforts by national governments and their people [...] and enhancing support for inclusivity, particularly of those who are frequently marginalized and excluded," the UN chief [told](#) the Security Council during a briefing on his report, [Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace](#).

Today's Council [briefing](#) coincided with the UN General Assembly's [two-day meeting](#) on the same topic. In the Assembly, world leaders have recognized that efforts to sustain peace are necessary not only once conflict breaks out but also long beforehand, through preventative measures like dialogue and mediation, and addressing root causes.

In April 2016, the General Assembly and the Security Council [concurrently adopted](#) what have become known as the 'sustaining peace resolutions,' which Mr. Guterres has said send a clear joint message: while Member States have primary responsibility for building and maintaining peace, "we can all do more to strengthen the foundations of stability, wellbeing and cohesion."

The Secretary-General told the Council today that "building and sustaining peace requires addressing the roots of conflict, which often lie in poverty, exclusion, inequality, discrimination and serious violations of human rights," adding that the human and financial cost of focusing on responding to crises was unsustainable.

"Prevention is the foundation of building and sustaining peace," declared the UN chief, stressing that sustainable, inclusive development – deeply rooted in respect for all human rights – is the world's best preventative tool against violent conflict and instability.



UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

Secretary-General António Guterres addresses Security Council meeting on peacebuilding and sustaining peace.

“The [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) is our common global blueprint to tackle these root causes and create more peaceful, stable and resilient societies, founded on a fair globalization,” he said.

Calling for smarter investment in UN peacekeeping missions, he noted that his report also set out several options to increase, restructure and better prioritize funding dedicated to peacebuilding activities.

Prevention is the foundation of building and sustaining peace – UN Secretary-General António Guterres

He reiterated his call for a “quantum leap” in Member States’ support for the UN [Peacebuilding Fund](#), concluding that – following the General Assembly’s imminent adoption of a resolution outlining the joint path forward – “now it is time for action.”

Also briefing the Council, Dan NecuIyescu, of Romania, Chair of the UN [Peacebuilding Commission](#), reflected on that body’s role in fostering coherence at the intergovernmental level in the Sahel, Liberia and the Gambia, which in turn allowed the UN to be “more valuable, strategic and effective in the field – where it matters.”

Smail Chergui, Commissioner for Peace and Security of the African Union (AU), spotlighted the implementation of an AU Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development Policy, which employs both preventative and stabilization dimensions. He also described the AU’s quick-impact and peace-strengthening projects and work it carries out through its various liaison offices.

Citing critical lessons learned in the AU's work, he said there is an urgent need to strengthen cooperation in prevention, which remains the most cost-effective, but least-resourced, tool.

There is also a need to shift towards a more people-centred paradigm, with a specific focus on peace dividends, especially for women and girls, he said, also stressing that "local perspectives must be incorporated and marginalized communities must be empowered."