

## [FEATURE: As Afghan war grinds on, a marginalized young generation raises its voice](#)

31 October 2017 – It is “show time” on *Asia Television* in Western Afghanistan, as talk show guest Somaia Ramish replies to a pointed question about war and peace.

“Fortunately, women haven’t had a major role in the conflict or the destruction of Afghanistan, which strengthens our voices at the peace table,” said the provincial councilwoman, 30, adding: “Unfortunately, these days, violent extremism has a bigger advertising budget than does the promotion of peace.”

Confronting the horrors of a war they hope to end one day, young Afghans are making themselves heard through traditional media and on the Internet. These Afghans, many educated and non-traditional, are countering messages from militant groups which seek to play upon ethnic and religious differences to encourage violence.

The young Afghan voices belong to students, young politicians, and also journalists. In the case of *Asia Television*, support from the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan ([UNAMA](#)) helps sustain a regular peace dialogue, which runs alongside a slate of soap operas and other entertainment shows. The support is part of a nationwide UN effort to invest in peace, and the show’s producers say it sends a strong message and helps drive grassroots conflict resolution.

Young Afghans remain highly susceptible to war propaganda, which comes in the form of street whispers and threats over social media. At the same time, it is a challenge for the central Government to win the respect of young Afghans, especially in distant provinces.

“Without security, we can’t have peace,” says Arash Majedi, 23, who serves lamb and chicken kabobs in a strobe-lit shisha café, which plays a steady beat of Iranian rap music. “It is the responsibility of the Government to stop someone from blowing us up.”



Arash Majedi, seen here at a shisha café in Herat, wants the Government to make Afghanistan a safer place to live. Photo: Fraidoon Poya

Set on the western edge of Afghanistan, surrounded by pockets of war and bordering Iran, Herat is a 5,000-year-old centre of Asian culture caught between a tide of extremism and popular, albeit ancient, traditions of cultivating flower gardens and reciting poetry with friends and relatives.

“Insurgents are active in almost all the districts around us,” said Said Sayedi, 28, who heads a conflict resolution centre in Herat, which has struggled for funding in recent years. “In some cases, foreign powers are trying to dominate more moderate insurgent groups to keep other militants in check.”

“We try to encourage independent thinking and help the young choose non-violence,” he said. “This needs to be elaborated in order that they can break free.” Sayedi concedes that there are many “no-go zones” around Herat where conflict resolution experts cannot enter. “We would need an escort to go south to Shindand district. There are lots of kids – 15 and 16 years old – who are being recruited there by rival factions.”

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UN officials said local peace initiatives remain in dire need of more outside help to sustain their work. “Afghan youth are actually reaching out to the UN and conveying to us their wish that the UN [and others] can play a new role in regional peace negotiations,” said Najibullah Rezaee, a UN political affairs officer.

Even as the battle for the hearts of young Afghans intensifies, new voices are speaking up. “Despite the challenges and marginalization young Afghans face, they still are carrying out a new and dynamic role in support of peace,” said Fraidoon Poya, a public affairs officer with UNAMA in Herat.

Behind the iron gates of Herat University, built to a modern and spacious design after the fall of the Taliban in 2001, Arman Qaderi, 23, a senior in the law faculty, organizes classes and edits texts on peace. His Peace Club has produced, with the help of Professor Nasir Rahimi, a systematic approach to changing minds and behaviour.

“The most important thing we can do is help to motivate people who already feel the urge for peace,” said Qaderi. A colleague Fardina Salehi, 28, works as a financial secretary and also as an instructor in peacemaking. “Here in Afghanistan, we experience more war than we do peace,” said Salehi. “I’ve learned that peace starts in the family and moves to society. Our approach is totally different than any of the other classes taught here at Herat University. We approach learning through discussion, participation and brainstorming.”



Herat University Peace Club, anchored by Arman Qaderi (left) and Professor Nasir Rahimi (second on left) and Fardina Salehi (4th from left.) Photo: Fraidoon Poya

“Due to ongoing conflict, we are all in violence with each other – even within our own families,” said Salehi. “When I watch violence on TV, my mind

is further disturbed. We all have to seek ways to calm our minds.”

Professor Rahimi said he has seen a change sweeping across the campus in Herat. In a walk with students down to a newly-inaugurated Park for Peace, he reflects on some changes he’s seen in recent years. He says peace is not an easy path, but one with a growing following.

Recently, 20 students from the Sharia Law faculty took a two-week journey to India to walk in the footsteps of Mahatma Gandhi, who spearheaded India’s independence movement based on non-violent resistance. The tour included visits to Gandhi’s home and to his ashram. When violence engulfed Herat on a recent week, these same students helped to organize a city-wide blood drive to support victims of sectarian violence.

“When we began our peace initiative, a lot of students doubted the approach: They said, ‘You can’t possibly bring peace after so much failure and war,’” said Professor Rahimi. “Students openly wonder – after decades of war – how talking about peace is going to make a difference. After they overcome initial doubts, however, they come to me and ask how they can move towards a deeper understanding of peace.”

*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.*

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## [UN Security Council urges more protections for children in conflicts](#)

31 October 2017 – Deeply concerned about the abuse of children in war zones, the United Security Council today met in a debate in New York which included [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres and his special envoy on the issue. The Council urged countries and non-State actors to allow children access to education and

The Council said that it is gravely concerned by the scale and severity of human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law committed against children in some countries, including terrorism, mass abductions, and sexual slavery, which can cause displacement and affect access to education and healthcare services.

Through a statement agreed by all 15 of its members, the Council also noted that children’s international human rights continue to be violated with impunity in some countries, and stressed that the best interests of children, as well as their needs and vulnerabilities, be considered when

making any decisions related to children in war zones.

Welcoming the Secretary-General's enhanced engagement with parties on the issue, the Council reiterated that protection of children should be an important aspect of a comprehensive strategy to resolve conflict and sustain peace.

Addressing the Council's day-long debate, the Secretary-General said children around the world are suffering enormously and unacceptably, resulting in global shame.

If we leave the next generation traumatized, seething with grievances, we betray those we serve and we betray ourselves, he [said](#) in the open debate of the Council.

He pointed to his [latest report](#) on the issue, which included a record high number of child casualties in Afghanistan, a doubling of verified cases of recruitment and use of children in Syria and Somalia, and widespread sexual violence against children in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria, South Sudan and other countries.

However, the report, which was presented to the Council earlier this month, also notes better protections, including the release of children held in Somali prisons, and substantive measures taken by the coalition in Yemen led by Saudi Arabia.

We need to strengthen our engagement with regional and sub-regional actors, Mr. Guterres said, stressing the need for additional legal and political commitments to protect children, and urging Member States to provide resources to support these initiatives.

He also appealed to all parties to the conflicts to work with the UN, to ensure protection for the most precious resource of your countries: your children.

Among the dozens of other speakers who addressed the Council today was the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Virginia Gamba.

She said [children are used](#) as fuel of war, and called for international action to address the use of children as expendable commodities by warring parties.

Echoing the Secretary-General's call for resources, the Special Representative appealed for adequate funds to implement and sustain reintegration, reinsertion and reskilling programmes to support children conscripted into armies. She also reiterated that such children, including girls, are primarily victims.

Violations of child protection provisions must be investigated and violators held to account, she said: Accountability must be prioritized to break cycles of violence and prevention efforts.

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## Rohingya refugees drown as boat capsizes in rough waters off coast of Bangladesh – UN

31 October 2017 – At least four Rohingyas fleeing unrest in Myanmar drowned when a small fishing boat capsized in rough seas off the Bangladesh coast, the United Nations reported Tuesday, also warning that with thousands of refugees still heading to Cox's Bazar every day, sprawling makeshift camps there are now dangerously congested and overcrowded.

UNHCR [the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees] staff and our partners [rushed to the scene](#) to provide medical support, food, blankets and clothes to the survivors, spokesperson Babar Baloch told reporters at the regular press briefing in Geneva.

According to survivors, six families – 42 people in total, many of them women and children – left on a fishing boat from Gozon Dia south of Maungdaw town in Myanmar's northern Rakhine state around 2 am Tuesday morning. They ran into rough seas and approached shore in the Imamerdail area of Ukhia sub-district in Bangladesh around 8.30 am local time when they ran into rough seas.

A 15-year-old boy died on the spot and 22 were injured, several when they hit the engine. Three were reported to have died *en route* to hospital, Mr. Baloch reported, adding that the remaining 19 injured were taken to UNHCR's transit centre near Kutupalong camp. We will ensure that families are not separated in the course of the medical treatment.

Meanwhile, the UN International Organization for Migration ([IOM](#)) reported that although the number of new arrivals is now slowing, people continue to arrive in the makeshift settlements of Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar every day, bringing the total Rohingya population of the district to over 820,000.

The settlements are [dangerously congested and overcrowded](#) and the pressure on sources of clean drinking water and basic sanitation are enormous. Having walked for days without water and food, the refugees arrive to the settlements exhausted and thirsty. Many are ill, IOM stated.

All of the spontaneous and makeshift sites where the Rohingyas have sought shelter are in urgent need of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) support to prevent diseases and to restore basic human dignity, explained IOM WASH expert Antonio Torres. Existing [sanitation and hygiene] facilities are not yet sufficient to cope with this number of people, he noted.

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sought shelter are in urgent need of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) support to prevent diseases and to restore basic human dignity,&#8221 says IOM WASH expert Antonio Torres. &#8220Existing WASH facilities are not yet sufficient to cope with this number of people,&#8221 he noted.

IOM is providing vital relevant services to both the Rohingya and the communities hosting them, while scaling up its work to meet the needs of new arrivals. Since early September, the agency has, among others, constructed around 785 latrines for the refugees. It has also constructed 14 wells with hand pumps providing over 14,000 people with clean drinking water.

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## [UN sees ‘worrying’ gap between Paris climate pledges and emissions cuts needed](#)

31 October 2017 – Pledges made under the [Paris Agreement](#) are only a third of what is required by 2030 to avoid the worst impacts of climate change, pointing to the urgent need to boost efforts by both government and non-government actors, the United Nations environment wing said on Tuesday.

&#8220One year after the Paris Agreement entered into force, we still find ourselves in a situation where [we are not doing nearly enough](#) to save hundreds of millions of people from a miserable future,&#8221 said UN Environment Programme (UNEP) Executive Director Erik Solheim in a press release.

The Paris accord, adopted in 2015 by 195 countries, seeks to limit global warming in this century to under 2 degrees Celsius above the pre-industrial level.

&#8220If we invest in the right technologies, ensuring that the private sector is involved, we can still meet the promise we made to our children to protect their future. But we have to get on the case now,&#8221 the UNEP chief added.

The eighth edition of UNEP’s [Emissions Gap Report](#), released ahead of the UN Climate Change Conference in [in Bonn](#) next month, warns that as things stand, even full implementation of current national pledges makes a temperature rise of at least 3 degrees Celsius by 2100 very likely.

Should the United States follow through with its stated intention to leave the Paris accord in 2020, the picture could become even bleaker.

The pace of growth in carbon dioxide emissions have slowed, driven in part by renewable energy, notably in China and India, raising hopes that emissions

have peaked, as they must by 2020, to remain on a successful climate trajectory.

To avoid overshooting the Paris goals, governments and including by updating their Paris pledges and the private sector, cities and others need to urgently pursue actions that will bring deeper and more-rapid cuts.

Source: The Emissions Gap Report 2017 | UNEP

The report also says that adopting new technologies in key sectors, such as agriculture, buildings, energy, forestry, industry and transport, at investment of under \$100 per tonne, could reduce emissions by up to 36 gigatonnes per year by 2030, more than sufficient to bridge the gap.

However, it warns that other greenhouse gases, such as methane, are still rising, and a global economic growth spurt could easily put carbon dioxide emissions back on an upward trajectory.

Strong action on hydrofluorocarbons, through the [Kigali Amendment](#) to the Montreal Protocol, and other short-lived climate pollutants such as black carbon and could also make a real contribution.

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## [Unrest in Cameroon's Anglophone regions sends thousands fleeing to Nigeria – UN agency](#)

31 October 2017 – The United Nations refugee agency is scaling up efforts with partners to provide humanitarian assistance to thousands of Cameroonians who have fled violence in that country's Anglophone regions to south-eastern Nigeria.

UNHCR [the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees] is working with the Nigerian Government and other UN agencies on a contingency plan, readying humanitarian assistance for up to 40,000 people crossing into Nigeria, Babar Baloch, spokesperson for UNHCR, [told reporters](#) Tuesday at the regular press briefing in Geneva.

However, he pointed out that our fear is that 40,000 might actually be a conservative figure in a situation where the conflict might continue.

UNHCR and its Nigeria teams are currently evaluating the situation in various locations in south-eastern Nigeria and have registered some 2,000 people so far.

Additional 3,000 are awaiting registration, while more people might be stranded in forests in Cameroon when trying to cross the border.

Moreover, the UN agency has distributed relief items such as mattresses, blankets, mosquito nets, cooking utensils, hygiene kits, as well as 40 tons of food in Nigeria's Cross River state.

“The current influx of Cameroonians seeking refuge in Nigeria poses additional challenges to the international community and a burden to an already stretched assistance,” Mr. Baloch explained.

Nigeria and Cameroon are already grappling with one of the world's worst humanitarian crises, with 2.5 million people displaced by Boko Haram insurgency, according to UNHCR.

Cameroon's Anglophone regions have seen multiple strikes and demonstrations over the past year as tensions have mounted over what the country's English-speakers see as discrimination against them in favour of the majority French-speaking population.