Championing women in peace in Afghanistan

The war in Afghanistan has lasted for nearly four decades, and the Afghan peace process is ongoing. Intra-Afghan peace negotiations began between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Taliban in Doha, Qatar, this month. UN Volunteer Zohra Hashimi, who was a refugee once herself, is hopeful and committed to contributing as best she can to ensure peace in the country. Today, on the International Day of Peace, we share her story.

Zohra Hashimi is serving as a UN Volunteer Project Officer for the Peace and Reconciliation project with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Afghanistan. She provides programmatic, technical and fiduciary support to the High Peace Council and other relevant entities working towards peace and reconciliation in the country.

To assist the country’s peace and stability, UNDP has supported and funded
activities such as *Ulema* (religious scholar engagement), public outreach to and mobilization of civil society, women and youth networks and the private sector, as well as traditional outreach to tribal elders and the families of victims. UNDP has also engaged academic and educational institutes, and supported capacity development and coordination of national and local peacebuilders and centres of peace.

The UN Secretary-General in a statement said that the recently-resumed peace talks present a major opportunity to achieve the long-held aspirations of the people of Afghanistan for peace.

> "I pay tribute to the resilience and courage of all Afghans. Their consistent calls for an end to violence and a chance to develop their own country underpin today’s inaugural meeting. Afghans themselves must determine the content and nature of the negotiations. An inclusive peace process, in which women, youth and victims of conflict are meaningfully represented, offers the best hope of a sustainable solution. --Mr António Guterres, United Nations Secretary-General"

Zohra is passionate about ensuring just that.

> "As peace talks are underway in Qatar, Afghanistan is at a critical historical juncture. I will put all my efforts to ensure that the voices of Afghan women and the marginalized population are heard, and the process is inclusive to all the population of the country. -- Zohra Hashimi, UN Volunteer with UNDP, Afghanistan"
UN Volunteer Zohra Hashimi (far left) during a field visit to Herat Province with her team and the Governor of Herat. ©UNV, 2020

Zohra shares, "I was born during the Taliban rule, in the Ghazni province of Afghanistan, and had to move to Pakistan when I was a toddler. For as long as I can remember, my life and the life of my family and friends have been shadowed by the war in Afghanistan.

I grew up in a refugee camp near Quetta, Pakistan. Life was not easy as a migrant at the time, but eventually I finished school and returned to Kabul to pursue my higher education. I received a full scholarship at the American University of Afghanistan and completed my Bachelor’s degree in Political Science and Public Administration.

After decades of continued chaos, turmoil, and devastating war in Afghanistan, I am hopeful that one day peace will come to Afghanistan; but the question remains: when?

Resolving any conflict encompasses efforts to find common ground between the affected parties, however, in Afghanistan, the war is complex.

With the ongoing peace talks, the government delegation is represented by a number of powerful political female figures. This is important to go beyond traditional ideologies and ensure all of the country's population is represented.

As a young woman working in the peace sector, my main objective, through my work, is to support in increasing the effective role of women in the political future of the country."

- UNDP
- refugees
- International Day of Peace

Sustainable Development Goal: SDG 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions, SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals