Nothing left to sell except some cheap clothes. The street vendors had almost the streets begging for a small amount dirty burqas, sitting on the corners of yellow and white Moskvitches were either parked for hours or roared past you with no passengers inside. Old women moaned and groaned, covered in their dirty burlas, sitting on the corners of the streets begging for a small amount of money. Not a single person had clean clothes. The street vendors had almost nothing left to sell except some cheap chewing gum. This is a picture of the city that welcomed me back to my homeland in 2003. Over a decade later, nearly 5 million students, over 2 million of which are girls, attend schools and universities across the country. The roads are asphalted, houses are taller, and cars are cleaner. I see equal numbers of girls and boys with clean clothes and flashy white smiles springing out of the many educational centers alongside Mazari Road. The country may be at war. One third of the total territory may be in the hands of the insurgents. Schools may have been torn down or burnt to the ground. But Afghanistan is still among the youngest countries in the world with 73% of the population under the age of 30. Despite poverty and insecurity and all the unfavorable circumstances, a fresh and invigorating breeze disperses the sable cloud revealing a glorious light in the Kabul sky.

Afghan youth are a new, strong and vibrant generation. I see a passionate, motivated and sagacious crowd – the silver lining of the sable cloud, our horizon of hope. This is a generation born from the women who have been most oppressed in Afghanistan’s history and thus know the importance of equality. These women have planted the seeds of equality among their children. The young generation knows the systematic suffering of imposed cultural restrictions, the injustice of segregating women from men. This generation knows the value of equality and is committed to bringing about a radical change in society’s behavior with women. This is the generation of Star Educational Society. Star’s vision is to cultivate transformation using strategies that develop critical thinking skills in our students, encourage open-mindedness and challenge them to raise their self-awareness. We provide equal opportunities for girls to teach and study at Star branches. We hold debates in the classrooms, host speech competitions, sponsor essay contests, and highlight promising students and share inspiring stories through the Interstellar Bulletin – all initiatives with themes that nurture and reward the attributes that are needed in Afghanistan’s new generation. We honor the best students at Star, not just the top-performing students, but the students who embody the values of human rights that we promote. Among many transformative workshops and programs held at Star are work shops to eliminate violence against women and to end street harassment.

We are proud that over 15,000 of our 38,000 alumni are women. We are proud that nearly 40% of our active instructors are women. And we are also proud that a large number of our successful female graduates have found scholarship opportunities to study abroad. This week we celebrate the women of Star and all women who moved forward. Women are helping the country move forward. Fifteen years ago, if you were a woman in Afghanistan, you could be... woman in 2003 – the country my family had escaped from before my birth. I, like many others, anticipated the beautiful landscape that had been painted in my mind by my parents and others who longed to return to their homeland. When I first saw the city of Kabul, I discovered a city of dusty streets and poor housing surrounded by short muddy walls. Chimneys stretched their necks from every rooftop and the smoke made a sable cloud that suffocated every by passer. The streets were crowded with poor men, young and old, whose facial scars, heavy clothes, and unwashed faces spoke of despair, disappointment and poverty. The city looked like a graveyard.

The walls were spotted with bullet holes. The debris of war was everywhere. Old yellow and white Moskvitches were either parked for hours or roared past you with no passengers inside. Old women moaned and groaned, covered in their dirty burlas, sitting on the corners of the streets begging for a small amount of money. Not a single person had clean clothes. The street vendors had almost nothing left to sell except some cheap chewing gum. This is a picture of the city that welcomed me back to my homeland in 2003. Over a decade later, nearly 5 million students, over 2 million of which are girls, attend schools and universities across the country. The roads are asphalted, houses are taller, and cars are cleaner. I see equal numbers of girls and boys with clean clothes and flashy white smiles springing out of the many educational centers alongside Mazari Road. The country may be at war. One third of the total territory may be in the hands of the insurgents. Schools may have been torn down or burnt to the ground. But Afghanistan is still among the youngest countries in the world with 73% of the population under the age of 30. Despite poverty and insecurity and all the unfavorable circumstances, a fresh and invigorating breeze disperses the sable cloud revealing a glorious light in the Kabul sky.

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A Journey of Empowerment

About the author: Jan Afza is a Star alumna and former Star teacher. She is currently studying at the Asian University for Women in Bangladesh, majoring in Politics, Philosophy and Economics. She plans to be a social entrepreneur in the future.

From the moment I sat behind the steering wheel and started to drive, I had the feeling that I could stand on my own feet. I had a newfound sense of independence and freedom. I could go anywhere without bothering my family members to take me there and no longer needed to be accompanied by a man in my travels.

The requirement of being reliant on a male guardian was imposed during the Taliban regime in the name of culture and religion. Women were not even allowed to step out of our homes without being escorted by a male relative. Although the Taliban era had passed, there were still some conservative religious groups that saw women’s driving as a concept opposed to Afghan culture and Islamic religion. In this case, women are obligated to rely on their male relatives or other males to drive them to work, school or other activities.

In the crowded city of Kabul, public transportation is a place of harassment for women. Women complain of unwanted gazes and physical harassment on the cramped, crowded mini-buses that are often the only method of public transport in the city. I remember many times that I rode on a bus or other public transportation and I witnessed women having uncomfortable rides or being harassed. Although it seems that public transportation has been gender-segregated in Afghanistan where women take a seat in front of vehicles and men at the back, still when transportation becomes too crowded, women are being harassed.

I remember one early Friday morning on my way to an English coaching center. There were only two female passengers, and I another young woman sitting beside me in the first row and all the male passengers at the back. Suddenly, I felt something touching my backside from under the seat. It was the hand of a man sitting behind me. I screamed loud and slapped the man in the face while he put his head down and said nothing. “Why are you complaining in a public bus?” the driver shouted at me. “If you don’t want to be harassed, stay at your home and don’t come out.”

Women in Afghanistan have to fight with cultural stereotypes and religious misconceptions. At the same time, we must face sexual harassment on public transportsations and on the streets. Driving gave me the feeling of safety because it allowed me to move without being disturbed or harassed by strangers. When I was driving, the contemptuous glances of male strangers on the streets and their verbal abuses had no impact on me. I was not any longer afraid of the dirty hands that touched me on the road or slapped me on my backside. Learning how to drive in Kabul, where few women have the opportunity to drive, gave me the feeling that the streets belong to me as well.

Learning how to drive taught me that sitting behind the steering wheel acts as an indicator of women’s empowerment and, moreover, it taught me that Afghan people’s ideologies, especially men, are changing about women’s abilities and their roles in society. When I started driving on the streets of Kabul, the happy faces outnumbered the unwanted gazes looking towards me. There are still conservative people who oppose women’s driving. There are disagreements, but the general perception of people is changing over time.

There was one time I was driving my family from one region to another. I was disturbed by a male driver who hit our car and demanded repairs for his car because I was a woman or, in his opinion, a naïve driver. So, I was blamed according to him. When people gathered, they did not blame me as a naïve driver and regardless of gender concerns concluded that I was not responsible for the accident. “Look,” a man from the crowd said to the male driver, “her car is damaged more than yours and it seems that you have hit on her car’s side.” But the male driver said, “No, it is her fault because women should not drive. And when they do, they cause accidents.” Then, while the crowds looked at me with their heads down, the tried to make the male driver understand that this is not the case in today’s world.

There was a time when I was told that only men should drive. However, like many other Afghan women, I wanted to break that baseless tradition. I remember seeing the advertising posters for driving schools in Kabul which admitted female students. In Afghanistan, when women learn how to drive it is a sign of women’s empowerment and another step toward gender equality. Moreover, it shows that people’s perception about women’s participation in public affairs is changing. Essentially, driving has become a symbol of change for women in Afghanistan. Since learning how to drive, I have become more independent and self-reliant and I now enjoy a safe environment to do my daily activities.

Being the change

“Imagine there’s no countries / It isn’t hard to do / Nothing to kill or die for / And no religion too / Imagine all the people / Living life in peace…”
- John Lennon

As an individual who has the chance to be educated and is able to ask questions and look for answers, it is my responsibility to work hard to overcome the challenges that we face in every second of our daily lives. Change can be very simple, but someone needs to start it. Like pedaling a bicycle in the streets of Kabul. While bicycling gives the joy of breathing the fresh air that is touching your face, we live in a society where women were never allowed to ride bicycles. So I started riding a bicycle.

People need somebody to be a pioneer in bringing positive changes in society. I was neither stoned, nor killed. I was even appreciated by some people for riding a bike. I live in a male-dominated and very male-dominated society, with people experiencing decades of war and brutality. Living in such a society, I might put the exactly what having a safe, free, and mutually respected people means. But I know it is something that is worth fighting for and it is a change that needs to be brought to my country.

The biggest change I want to see in the world is that there is peace everywhere, no boundaries, no religion, no war, nothing to kill each other for and a world full of beauty. If we look at just my country, I want every child to go to school and learn the beautiful songs of the alphabet, and not worry about bread for their families. I want tourists to come to my country, have experiences and take pictures with the Buddhas in Bamyan and share them with their friends, telling stories about the beauty of Afghanistan, while having no threat or fear of being exploded. And I want that we have the freedom to ride bicycles.

The time has come for us to bring change. The time has come where there is more responsible for what is happening to us. Star Educational Society has inspired its teachers and students to bring change and serves as a great example of creating change. Star has decades of experience in bringing great changes, with awesome people working hard and being the heroes in many people’s lives. I am being the change that my society and people have been waiting for. Every Thursday, I help girls to learn how to ride bicycles and every Friday we give them a chance to practice what they learned, and help to deal with the challenges they might face on the street. We ride in the very early morning in less crowded areas to make the girls feel more comfortable.
International Women’s Day 2016

Search Google images for “Afghan women” and you find an assortment of burqa-clad, veiled women - the last kinds of images that come to my mind when I think of Afghan women. The Afghan women I know have beautiful faces, strong personalities, tender hearts and invincible souls. This is just a small sample of images of the Afghan women I know - strong, independent, high-spirited, courageous women living in a country where just being a woman requires constant vigilance and fortitude. Happy international women’s day to all the women I know.

I have known Husnia since 2008. In addition to climbing mountains, she has overcome many obstacles to pursue her dreams and has helped many others to pursue theirs.

Halima said, “People need somebody to be a pioneer in bringing positive changes in the society. I am going to be the change that my society and people have been waiting for.”

Noorjahan is the co-founder of Free Afghan Women Writers and has been recognized with many awards including one of the Forbes Top 100 Most Powerful Women in the World.

Fatima (second from right) said, “We’re trying to push women to have equal presence in society, and biking is just part of it.” Halima is pictured in center.

Maryam (on right) received a special invitation to the 100th Anniversary of International Women’s Day with Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, and other women leaders from around the world.

Maasooma, is a wonderful role model for young Afghan women. She is an activist fighting for women’s rights, education and other social justice causes. Her honest, uncensored views are something I treasure.

For an Afghan girl, running can be a threat for her safety. This young Afghan woman has been running competitively during her high school and university studies and has discovered and embraced a new freedom.

Sadaf is a leader in the Afghan women’s business community. This young woman has presented at many international conferences and is President of the Peace Through Business Network in Afghanistan.

This young woman was part of a team from Afghanistan that recently completed a 250km ultra-marathon in Sri Lanka. A true team player, she pursues her dreams with a selfless ambition and inspires everyone around her.

Maryam has been a dear friend since 2007. Do not mistake her initial quietness for weakness - she is a force to be reckoned with and her strength and talent have been recognized for most of the past ten years.

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Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, a Nigerian author, during one of her speeches called “all of us should be feminists” tells a story of an old man advising her not to be a feminist. When Adichie asks the reason, the old man answers that feminists are the angry women who can’t find their husbands for them. The story made the audience laugh.

Indeed, such definition is funny. But, what is feminism and who is feminist? When we talk about feminism and call ourselves feminists, do we know the meaning? Is a woman who is not taking part in the house works (cooking, washing clothes, cleaning and sweeping, supervising children), but is present in front lines of the advocacy demonstrations, a feminist? How valuable are the articles and feminist speeches of a man who is not even washing his own socks, and a woman cooks for him and serves him?

Yes, such symbolic actions and movements are hindering us to walk beyond the clichés. Until there is a bipolar society of men and women, and foster gender discrimination in each aspect of life, we will not have a better day than today. So, we should begin changes from our homes e.g. getting happy when a girl is born. From the early girlhood time, we should not dictate them. We should not force them abstain from play outside, laugh loudly, talk or associate to men and do the house works just because they are – females. Unfortunately, its most families there are no changes. The girls totally get used to such orders of “dos” and “don’ts” that it becomes normal for them, and believe that they are inferior to males. At the same time, boys are trained and behaved in a way that they find themselves in a higher position than girls just because they are males. This thought and belief let them think of themselves as owners of the women. Therefore, to reach gender equality we should remove such opinions from the very childhood. The changes should begin from homes then the society. Both sexes, from very childhood, should be encouraged to become friends as humans; so that when they are young, a simple talk or walk of girls and boys should not be a strange and unusual phenomenon. As much as the girls should be told to be careful about their behaviors, the boys should also be warned how to behave with girls. Both sexes should learn that considering all their differences, they both are “Human-beings” who are able to do anything equally whether at home or outside, and, these capabilities will not harm their masculinity or femaleness. Consequently, the articles and speeches about women and advocacies are valuable when equality dominates homes.

Simone de Beauvoir, philosopher, feminist and a French existentialist in her book, “Second Sex”, reasons that a human is not born woman but changed to a woman. De Beauvoir concludes that cultural and social structures (marriage, motherhood, and woman-man relation), history and defined myths force the girls to accept defined rules from childhood. As a result, women get ranked lower positions than men. It is important that history and myths and socio-cultural structures should be criticized, to define a humankind position for woman. De Beauvoir stresses that until the practices are repressive, and men define the identity of women; freedom will be something unreachable. For feminist struggles, it is important to know what feminism is; so that we do not misunderstand this phenomenon like the old Nigerian man. The feminists are combating for political, social and economic equality of women among men – like what De Beauvoir did. She was one of the most praised feminist, however, she has been criticized much. She struggled for equality, and her thoughts and views shocked heavily the patriarchal and traditional society of westerners in 1949 and the years that followed. In forming the first, second and third waves of feminism, Second Sex of De Beauvoir played a key and pivotal role. Liberal, radical, Marxist, psychological and social feminisms are all somehow influenced by De Beauvoir’s thoughts. Thus, when De Beauvoir says that a human is not born woman but changed to a woman should be taken seriously, and consider this sentence and not change a human to a second sex by our beliefs.

In conclusion, feminists believe that man is not a superior being, but is a human being equal to woman. In our society that woman is terrifically institutionalized and accepted as second sex and lower than man, the only way to cross this view, is that men and women should struggle to eradicate hindering practices, traditions and behaviors to reach to real freedom and equality. It is better to start this long walk from our own homes, ignoring our sexes and becoming a feminist soldier combating for a mankind society.
How Afghanistan's women are helping the country move forward

Written by: Laura Bush, an honorary co-chair of the U.S.-Afghan Women's Council and chair of the Women's Initiative at the George W. Bush Institute.

Source: BBC News

Fifteen years ago, if you were a woman in Afghanistan, you could be beaten for laughing in public or if your shoes made noise. You could be beaten or killed for going out alone, unaccompanied by a male guardian. Covered by burqas, women became strangers. Waiting in bread lines in Kabul, they learned to recognize each other from the sound of their voices and the faces of male children with them. Today, one of those women, Nasmina Rahmani, is a leading lawyer and educator, working toward her PhD.

And she is not alone. Women in Afghanistan are changing their lives and their nation. Fifteen years ago, barely 5,000 girls were enrolled in primary school. Soon that number will exceed 3 million. Thirty-six percent of teachers are women. Afghanistan's first lady, Rula Ghani, has launched a campaign to establish a female-only university, run by women. In government, women hold 69 seats in parliament. There are four female government ministers and two female provincial governors. Thousands of women have started their own businesses.

On Tuesday, International Women's Day, the George W. Bush Institute is releasing a new book, “We Are Afghanistan Women: Voices of Hope.” The book recounts inspiring stories such as Rahmani's, reminding us that the challenges Afghan women have endured and the incredible successes they have achieved.

It is hard to find another country where women have made such substantial gains against such overwhelming odds in so short a time. In the United States, women won the right to vote in 1920, but it wasn't until 1969 that nearly all of the elite Ivy League universities started admitting women. By 1961, only 20 women were serving in Congress. In the age of Twitter and Instagram, it can be hard to remember that real change takes time.

We should not underestimate the challenges that women in Afghanistan still face. Last July, three girls, ages 16 through 18, had acid thrown in their faces as they walked to school in Herat province. Violence against women remains a serious problem.

Yet I am hopeful. I am hopeful because of the skills, determination and abilities of Afghanistan's women.

When Sakena Yacoobi stood in a filthy, crowded Afghan refugee camp, she knew the one thing that every Afghan needed was an education. She opened 15 schools for 23,000 refugees. Today, one of her programs in Afghanistan teaches women to read, write and do math using cellphones. Naheed Farid, a young member of Afghanistan's parliament, faced death threats when she ran for office. Her face was cut out of campaign posters and opponents promised to dishonor her father-in-law's family. But her husband and father-in-law insisted she continue. Now she advocates for women and children and serves on the parliament's international relations committee.

Afghanistan is at a crossroads. It is a global hot spot that before 9/11 became a terrorist haven, and it is a young country: The median age is 18.3 years. U.S. policy in Afghanistan must be consistent. Afghanistan is a resilient society. The best way to build on this resilience is to be predictable in our support. If the United States turns its back on Afghanistan, other forces will step in to erase the hard-won but fragile gains that have been made.

We can and must help Afghanistan create a better future. We need to ensure that Afghanistan cannot again become a terrorist haven or fall to the Taliban or the Islamic State. In the interest of our own national security, we must assist Afghan security forces. I welcome President Obama's decision to maintain a U.S. military presence through 2016 and beyond. We know, and the Afghan people know, that we will not have troops in Afghanistan forever, but the country remains fragile, and the cost of leaving Afghanistan is too high.

We, and the entire international community, should continue to provide significant development assistance in the areas of health care, entrepreneurship and education. We know this assistance works. A 2013 RAND Corporation study found Afghanistan's metrics have improved in nearly every area of development.

By maintaining our presence and support, we are encouraging the Afghan government to keep its security commitments to the Afghan people and to build on economic and anti-corruption reforms and the rule of law. That is why it is critically important that any peace achieved through negotiations between Taliban leaders and the Taliban is not made at the expense of Afghan women. A return to policies that made the Taliban notorious in the 1990s would be traumatic not just for women but also for the stability of the country.

We must never forget that what happens in Afghanistan — and elsewhere in the world — matters to us here at home. The Afghan people are not asking us to solve their problems; they are asking us to remain engaged so that they have the space and opportunity to create their own solutions. As American University of Afghanistan's first female valedictorian, Onaba Payah, told me: "This is a reminder that we are not alone in those tough places, that there are people who care about us."

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Faryab: More than ten armed militants arrested

Translator: Eman Poya
Source: BBC News

Afghan security officials said that in the military operations of this country in Khisht Pol village, Khaja Sabzeposh District of Faryab Province in Southern Afghanistan, more than ten armed rebellions have been arrested or capitulated.

General Dostum, the first vice President is the commander of this operation. Reza Rezaie, one of the national army spokesmen in Faryab Province, on Friday, 26 of February told to BBC that Fifteen persons have been arrested. Meanwhile, the other 35 people who were besieged by the army, surrendered. According to Rezaie, more than 20 rebellions were also killed as a result of air attacks by the national army. He also said that in this actions three encampments of Taliban Group have been destroyed, one of which was being used as a prison.

Taliban have not yet spoken about these operations.

The Taliban claimed in Khaja Sabzeposh when Taliban closed the highway of Maimana, Faryab's capital, to Mazar-e-Sharif, and took some passengers with them.

The head of security said that members of this group arrested some passengers and opened fire on two of them last night, in this highway.

The Taliban claimed that these two persons were members of national army of Afghanistan. According to some claims, in recent months, the dependent forces of the Taliban took passengers as hostages, at least four times from this highway.

Messi's little fan, an Afghan

Translation by: Zahrat Aurvi
Source: Open Society Daily

Days ago, a little boy's picture was shared in social media who made a T-Shirt from striped plastic with a number “10” on its back which was the same as the football superstar of the world who plays in Argentina’s national football team, Lionel Messi's T-shirt.

The picture was taken from the back of the little boy, thereby, making recognition difficult. After seeing the picture, Lionel Messi wrote on his twitter page that he wants to find the boy and requested his fans to share his pictures so that he is found. The media attributed to the Football star of the world said: "We received a message from Lionel Messi and he wanted to know where and who the boy was, so that he could do something for his little fan.”

The message has been shared more than 7 thousand times. Meanwhile, some people from Kurdistan of Iraq reported to Messi's press team that the boy is from Iraq and his name is Honim. Messi tweeted some photos of Iraqi press interviewing the boy.

The happiness did not last long for Iraqi boy since activists of social media from Afghanistan tweeted that the boy was from Afghanistan. Mohib Shadan, one of the Social Media activists sent pictures with accurate information to Messi suggesting that the boy is actually from Afghanistan.

Consequently, Lionel Messi, the superstar of football world re-tweeted to millions of his fans and confirmed that the boy is actually from Ghazni province of Afghanistan.
Star Related

Starians Fighting Street Harassment

To participate in the International Anti-Street Harassment Week Campaign, take a photo of yourself or just your hands holding a sheet of paper with a message to a harasser written on it. Send to Free Women Writers at info@freewomenwriters.org by March 15, 2016.
Stories

My Grandmother Told Me

Your father didn’t tell us he was going to Australia. He talked about going somewhere, but I had never heard of Australia. I thought Australia was some place just across the mountains.

A few months later, I overheard women from our street talking about a boat sinking, and people drowning. They said those who drowned were Hazaras. Darkness fell upon my eyes. I immediately got up and returned home. I asked around if anyone knew anything else. Some of the servants told me not to worry as these were other people. Nonetheless, I wept all afternoon, and did not sleep that night. There was nothing we could do.

In the Spring of that year, some time after Norouz, Molaem called from Iran. He said he had heard about your father, and that he was fine. It made me very happy, but also perplexed. I was concerned as to why he wasn’t getting in touch with us.

A few months later, a man came over from Maribadiab and said they had heard from their relative in Australia. He had met your father and had passed to us greetings from him. I was overjoyed, but even more perplexed and terriﬁed as to why he wasn’t getting in touch with us.

A few months later, just days before the Eid that year when we were preparing Borsaz, when I heard someone knock at the door. The kid from the house next door stood at the door with a phone in his hand. He handed me the phone, and on the other side, I heard your father’s voice. I screamed out of joy. I could barely speak. He was alive, and speaking to me. It was him. I passed it to you. You screamed and cried your eyes out. Then your mother, and the others. We were happy.

A few weeks later, your uncle returned home, and said he had received a letter from your father. We were excited, and all gathered around uncle to listen to him read the letter. In his letter your father had written of his year in detention in the desert, his journey through the jungle, his encounter with wild animals and the possibility of death. He said they were being kept in a place in the desert that was cut off from the rest of the world. There were snakes and dangerous things all around their camp. They were in a prison. Our happiness quickly turned into sadness and tears. Your uncle couldn’t read any more of the letter. He folded it up and, we all cried.

A long time later, we received another call, and another letter. We found out that he had been released and lived in a city. He sent us his photos. And I saw my son for the ﬁrst time in years. I was happy. We were all happy.

Borsazh = A traditional cake.
What's a memory you have of growing up in Afghanistan?

One memory I have is from when we lived in Sheberghan, and summer can get very, very hot. The hottest hours passed and we were closer to the Talibenas, but I was very, very fortunate to have parents to bring education to the family, so that plays a part.

Tell us about what you're working on right now.

I'm the country director of Open Society Afghanistan, and the sectors that we focus on currently are women's issues, rule of law, good governance — on which we specifically focus on peace and reconciliation, and helping civil-society institutions in transition, as well as media.

In addition to my work with Open Society Afghanistan, I'm also a member of Afghanistan 1400, which is a youth-led political movement. It's basically a collective effort to mobilize young people around democratic values and an idea of Afghanistan as a united country.

What makes you want to stay, even through the chaos of the country? Is it the prospect for long-term stability?

Afghanistan is my home, and I believe it has a lot of potential. Because of all our hardship, the majority of Afghans really understand the value of peace. They really understand the value of democracy; democracy in the sense of being able to choose who governs you; democracy in the sense of transferring power from one person to the other without violence, peacefully.

I do think that, unfortunately, there will be continued violence. I'm a very realistic human being, but I also understand that violence will not go away very soon because the causes of violence are very, very deep in my society. My society has been traumatized; there is poverty, there is misunderstanding.

I believe in working as long as there are people who care for Afghanistan in Afghanistan. There are people who think beyond the survival of themselves and their families, and there are many people like that who I engage with on a daily basis, and they continue to inspire me.

In terms of your work, how successful have you been in terms of gender equality?

What have some of the challenges been? I'm sure you hear a lot in the media about the challenges, from harassment to lack of social tolerance for women's activism outside the house.

In the past 14 years, we had a wave of young women who are the first in their families, and sometimes their communities, to have access to higher education, to have jobs, to be breadwinners. This is a small group, but the social impact is really great. They are the pioneers, and they are changing people's conceptualization of gender norms.

For instance, in my own family, I have several cousins who are studying in Kabul. My province is in Northwest Afghanistan. They have been the first people in their families to graduate from high school. Their moms are illiterate. Not only that, these women are the first people in their families to graduate from high school. Their moms are illiterate. Not only that, they're also the first generation to travel around the world and live in America. When you become the decision about who to elect, they should closely look at their foreign policy. Are these leaders the kind likely to engage wisely with the issue of America's power in the world?

Seek out organizations that work in Afghanistan and support them. If you can host a student, if you can contribute to a scholarship fund, if you can contribute to a think tank that's doing some work in Afghanistan, please do.

What advice would you give to young Afghans?

One thing that has really worked for me is that an Afghan would spend money to host a student, if you can contribute to a scholarship fund, if you can contribute to a think tank that's doing some work in Afghanistan, please do.

What advice would you give to young women?

This century can be the century of women, globally. So much has happened. Too much more needs to happen and women who have the possibility to go to school, they also have the responsibility to do something, no matter how small, for women who can't do that.

I really believe in global sisterhood. Some of the things that we are doing, we are not just doing them for ourselves, we are also doing them for women around the world. Some of our success is beyond just personal successes.

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What can people do to get involved or help others in Afghanistan?

Think about activities that have the education now to speak. However, the younger generation of representatives is widening, and more diverse voices on issues of women's rights in Afghanistan. I'm so much from my mentors that you cannot imagine 30 years ago — that an Afghan would spend money to host a student, if you can contribute to a scholarship fund, if you can contribute to a think tank that's doing some work in Afghanistan, please do.

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