The new Student Affairs Committee, which has been established with the moti-
to, “We value you and we listen to you,” will solicit and consider students’ input and sanction the beneficial changes that Starians demand. I am honored to serve as the Director of this committee and I will draw from my experience as the former Afghan student representative at Panjshir University in Chardigarh, India. I know firsthand how effective this democratic system can be and the valuable contributions that student representatives can make to benefit their fellow students and their educational institution.

Star Educational Society advocates for progressivism and realizes the undeniable significance of consultation. As a result, Star has instituted this new committee to help discover and awaken the latent abilities of Star’s community of Afghan youths. As the Director of Student Affairs, I will endeavor to build a personal connection with students and help them reach their highest potential. This will enable Starians to feel utterly “at home” where they are not treated as mere customers, but as an inseparable part of our ever-extending educational community. Through consultation, we will better understand and address students’ grievances and consider their suggestions to improve Star’s educational environment, systems, and teaching practices.

Consultation and deliberation are major contributors to the improvement of every institution, small and large – from the family unit to the global community. Afghanistan, as one of the countries with the youngest population in the world, must include youth as the key contributors to any dialogues about improving the country. Star Educational Society recognizes Afghan youth as the assets and wealth of the country and has always strived to provide the best educational services to its students. Therefore, the Student Affairs Committee will work closely with Star’s students, the Cultural Board and the entire administration of our institution.

Our extensive activities will include organizing and holding sports tournaments and other extracurricular activities that will unearth the hidden potentials of students. Students will have the opportunity to contribute to Star’s popular weekly newspaper, the Interstellar Bulletin, introducing and exposing them to thousands of readers and contributors across the country and abroad. We will concentrate on providing an environment that will nurture the students’ talents and develop their overall skills. To meet this objective, the committee will introduce minor and major reforms to the various sections of the institution based on students’ suggestions.

To bridge the gap between students, instructors and administrators, a weekly meeting of class representatives will be convened at Star’s A Branch. A report from each meeting will be sent to Chairman Ali Reza Yasa for further consideration and final approval of suggestions. Each class will participate by introducing a democratically elected representative who will be expected to attend the weekly meetings and present the suggestions of their classmates. The class representatives will be required to assist the Student Affairs Committee by providing periodic reports of suggestions and grievances from their class fellows. This new strategy, based on community involvement of Starians, will enable all students to have a voice in Star’s operations and will be most successful with your active participation. Hence, I cordially invite students from every level to actively participate and play their roles in making this initiative a success.

"Best Student" Winners

Every semester Star Educational Society chooses a “Best Student” from each branch. The students are selected based on their moral conduct, their participation in class, completion and quality of homework assignments, their grades in school, any special achievements, and how active they are in extra-curricular activities. The Best Students chosen for this semester are: Amir Khan Babaie from A Branch, Kamila Sultani from B Branch and Amina Mohammadi from C Branch.

Amir Khan Babaie is a Level 6 student at Star A Branch. He is 16 years old and he is in the 9th grade. His goal is to be a businessman in the future. Amir Khan began studying at Star in the beginner level Prep 1 class and has held the first position from Prep 1 through Level 6. His hobby is football. Amir Khan is inspired by his older brother, Ali Jan, and his cousin, Ahmad Parsa. He is an active participant in quiz competitions, speech contests and class competitions. Amir Khan’s perseverance, hard work, extra-curricular activities and even-tempered behavior made him the best student of the semester.

Kamila Sultani is a Level 6 student at Star B Branch. She is 17 years old and in the 11th grade at Asif Mall High School. She possesses a great competitive spirit and claims that her success is more due to her diligence than her inherent talent. She also attributes her success to her parents’ inspiration and support. She is a member of the student council at her school and is active in speech contests, quiz competitions and reading circle gatherings at Star. She has held the first position since level Prep 2. She enjoys reading books, interactions with knowledgeable personalities and academic discussions.

Amina Mohammadi is a Level 5 student at Star C Branch. She is 13 years old and in the 7th grade at Koshan High School. One of her favorite activities is volleyball. She has been studying at Star since Level 2 and has held the first position in all four of her classes. She is a diligent student who works very hard in addition to being ambitious. Her goal is to be a doctor and to pursue her university studies in England at a fine medical school. She is the group leader of her class at school and also an active member of the tableau group at Star Educational Society’s C Branch.
My Untold Story....

I was knifed. And the few minutes time after the incident was a matter of life or death for me. Everybody’s assumption was that I wouldn’t have a ghost of a chance of surviving after what happened to me. I had watched horror movies, of course, but never fathomed how it must have been when someone was shot, knifed or injured.

It was about 9 o’clock at night. I got off the car and started walking towards home as I was living a few yards further from the main road. I had no idea what could happen in few minutes’ time. It was totally dark and I was walking in the dark alleys towards my home. While walking, I heard footsteps behind me. I guessed they were pedestrians just like me, so I ignored them and continued walking. I felt they were trying to get closer to me and I became suspicious. I had, of course, heard that people were mugged, beaten, injured or even killed in broad daylight in those alleys of the area where I was living and my fear was compounded. I either had to quicken my pace or swerve to avoid being seen by them. Instead, I ignored everything and kept walking and was only a few yards from my home.

As the men became closer to me, I knew I couldn’t get to my own home. Suddenly I started knocking hard on a neighbor’s gate. “Help! Help! Help!” I shouted. It was just then when one of them pointed his gun at me and the other tried to get close to me. I don’t know why they attacked me—very unconsciously I didn’t want them to drag me away from my alley. On the other hand, those few minutes could have been a matter of death or life for me. I didn’t know how much time had passed when I saw my neighbors coming out of their homes.

The attackers pulled the gun’s trigger trying to shoot me but they couldn’t. A neighbor flashed a torch onto me and said my abdomen was bleeding. “How could this happen?” everyone wondered. Later, I noticed my shirt and pants were slightly torn and I was knifed in my abdomen and my left thigh. Since my abdomen was bleeding heavily, my neighbors quickly took me to a local hospital. But no hospital accepted me since I had received severe injuries and they thought it was very unlikely for me to survive an operation. If anything happened to me, it would be hard for them to disclaim any responsibility.

After being rejected from many hospitals, my neighbors finally took me to a governmental hospital where I was then hospitalized. Several times I became unconscious during our trips to different hospitals. At the governmental hospital, it was 2 AM when a surgeon came, took me to the emergency room, and started operating me. I woke up the next morning in a hospital room. Not wanting to be given any false hope, I asked my cousin, who was standing next to me, whether my injuries were too serious. He told me I was knifed five times and received horrific injuries in the attack including lacerations to my abdomen and my left thigh.

I remained hospitalized for three weeks and had to rest at home for two more months. A doctor visited me regularly since I was feeling insecure and could not go outside my home. Three months after the attack, my injuries were healed. I was able to do routine jobs and was somehow able to live like a normal person. Nevertheless, I couldn’t live my life the way I did before.

From the day of the attack, I always felt paranoid. Similarly, my family was concerned about me and my safety. Once I made up my mind to go to a foreign country and not even to stay in Afghanistan. I couldn’t live the life the way I did before. Although I have been in touch with my mother, who has been the only person in my life who has loved me and cared for almost five years.

About the author: Mohammedi Taqi Mohammedi is a Star alumni and former Star teacher. He currently has his own tailoring business and plans to pursue his bachelor’s degree in Business Administration in the near future.

My journey in Sociology

I have loved Sociology and Anthropology since I was in high school. Reading books and gathering with my school friends showed me a new way of viewing my social world which contributed to my interest in the field. Although Sociology is not appealing for many Afghan students, I enrolled in Sociology because I am interested in learning about family matters, social relationships and the community in which I live. The Sociology course descriptions sounded interesting and meeting my university teachers before the course began helped me to decide to major in Sociology.

Sociology is fascinating. It’s all about studying and understanding social behavior. If you are interested in learning about people and why they do what they do, you will undoubtedly like Sociology. It enables us to see what goes on behind society. It helps us to know how profoundly we are influenced by our society and the social groups to which we belong. Sociology focuses on significant social issues such as: socialization, globalization, social class, social problems, sociological perspectives sociological research, sociological theories, social values and more.

When I took my first course in Sociology, I was hooked. Recognizing how deeply my life had been affected by sociological life patterns helped me to better understand both my society and myself. Sociologists and social theories like: Auguste Comte and Positivism, Herbert Spencer and Social Darwinism, Karl Marx and Class Conflict, Emile Durkheim and Social Integration, Max Weber and the Protestant Ethic all inspired me with social perceptions that opened my eyes to a new world. From how people become homeless to how they become presidents, from why people commit suicide to why women are discriminated against in every society around the world and many other issues—all are part of Sociology. Sociology involves our sociological imaginations on the small scale-level to social class, gender, race, ethnicity, social stratification and education.

The more efficient way to learn Sociology in Afghanistan is with a profound body of social and anthropological resources. Yet, the social and anthropological resources are insufficient in this society. There are countless youths like me who have suffered with the rigid mindsets and social barriers in Afghanistan and have attempted to understand the source of these challenges. In the modern era, we inhabit a society which is dominated by explicit and tangible social and cultural practices. To date, there are only a few universities that teach Sociology. These universities try to produce Sociology scholars who can enhance the quality of research and sociological perspectives being studied, taught and shared in Afghanistan. In my opinion, my journey in Sociology is a journey to combat our dark and traditional cultural practices, illiteracy and extremism with knowledge and understanding. We need to read, research, and write so that Afghanistan can experience new changes, a new kind of life, and an open society instead of closed and rigid society. There is much to be done and I aim to do it!!
Unforgettable memory in Pakistan

It was one day before Eid in Quetta, Pakistan in 2013. I studied a lot for my final test at the center and I felt fully prepared. The teacher entered the class when I was talking to my friends. He gave us the test papers and we started our exam. When I saw the questions they seemed easy to me and I believe that was because I had studied hard. We were in the class with the test papers in our hand and we were busy taking our exam when we heard a terrifying sound. There was a bomb blast just behind our center and all the windows and doors of the classroom broke. The manager came to the class and asked all students to stay inside the class. We were not allowed to go out.

We all forgot the test and test papers. We were just thinking about our safety. I don’t know how much our family members were worried about us. We were inside the class for 30 more minutes. Then we were given permission to go outside the center. I saw a head without a body. It was a bad moment for me. I shouted and screamed. The teacher entered the class and all the windows and doors of the classroom broke. It was a very bad moment for us. We came to the mountain, the snow had ended and the snow-covered street was an enchanting view. When it rains in Kabul, the streets, alleys and walls get wet. The dust turns to mud. The humidity of the streets, alleys and walls makes me feel relaxed with the smell of flowers and spring. The alluring smell of flowers and trees diffuses a sweet smell creating a rainbow of fragrances into the Kabul air.

Of course, there are bad things in Kabul also. When I see all the beggars in the street asking for money, it makes me sad. The smell of trash, rotting food and other things in Kora Sange depresses me. Under the Pul-i-Sokhta and Pul-i-Mahmood Khan Bridges, the drug addicts are smoking and the toxic smells of heroin, opium, and cigarettes drift up from beneath the bridges. People are injecting themselves and it makes me disappointed in life because the government is not paying attention to them. When I pass this area and see the drug addicts, I witness adversity and failure. Two or three times in a week, we hear the sound of explosions and see people running from the site of the blasts. This is a lot of danger in Kabul City and many people leave the country to escape it.

When I walk in the streets, I see many people walking and running. All the people, sounds and smells of Kabul, some of the people have happy faces and some have sad faces. Likewise, Kabul has different scenery in different seasons. One sunny winter day, I was walking on a street when suddenly snow started to fall and covered the ground. It was really fantastic. After some minutes, the snow ended and the snow-covered street was an enchanting view. When it rains in Kabul, the streets, alleys and walls get wet. The dust turns to mud. The humidity of the streets, alleys and walls has a special fragrance. I enjoy it and everyone else likes it too. And on rainy days we hear the gentle tapping of the rain which gives us a fresh breath and a fresh spirit. It’s nighttime now. Kabul is very quiet. Kabul has the most silent nights. There are no sounds because no one goes out at night and all the sights, smells and sounds are resting before a new day in the city.

Kabul – a tapestry of the senses

The teacher entered the class when I was talking to my friends. He gave us the test papers and we started our exam. When I saw the questions they seemed easy to me and I believe that was because I had studied hard. We were in the class with the test papers in our hand and we were busy taking our exam when we heard a terrifying sound. There was a bomb blast just behind our center and all the windows and doors of the classroom broke. The manager came to the class and asked all students to stay inside the class. We were not allowed to go out.

We all forgot the test and test papers. We were just thinking about our safety. I don’t know how much our family members were worried about us. We were inside the class for 30 more minutes. Then we were given permission to leave the class. We immediately left the class. When I was coming out of the center, I saw a head without a body. It was a bad moment for me. I shouted and ran very fast away from the head. Although the blast was not very powerful, it killed three people.

Then I arrived home. My family became very happy. But I can never forget the head which was on the street. Even after the blast, I sometimes remembered the head. It was very hard for me. Then after some time we left Pakistan and came to Afghanistan, our own sweetland.
Continual disillusionment

Translated by: Jomakhan Rahyab
Source: Enlilatras

The change of a regime is always justified and accepted for a positive change of the situation. When a regime is ineffective and can’t facilitate the possibility of a prosperous life for its citizens, the people will try to collapse the dysfunctional regime with popular movements under different names and different approaches and create a new regime. But, establishing a new regime can’t always fulfill the founders’ wishes, especially the citizens. Sometimes it happens that the effort to reach an ideal and acceptable regime is deviated from its route. The way to Babylon will never lead them to Jerusalem and people are somewhere backing up the wrong tree. Aspirations to make reforms in the system of governance and transforming to a law-based regime will end in destruction and despair. The collapse of the previous government will sometimes result in nothing except regret. The path of the course can be changed and more corrupt rulers than previous leaders will take over the reins of the country. In such a situation, the citizens not only think the results of their struggle were ineffective, but will consider it a mistake and will prefer the previous tyranny and oppression to the situation they have reached after fights and battles. This is when they will be frustrated and will want to return to the past – to a time they struggled to change – and the past will become their tip-top ideal to achieve.

In Afghanistan, regimes are changing very quickly and the citizens are continually frustrated in these changes. The collapse of monarchy and establishment of the Republic, and in sequence, party government, left nothing but frustration for the citizens of Afghanistan. This frustration, however, does not end here, but with changing regimes, continues and the people are always suffering this problem. The Mujahidin’s government, which was the desire of a large traditional and religious society of Afghanistan, added misery to the Afghans and living quietly under a religious government changed to just a dream. When the ineffectiveness of the Mujahidin plagued Afghan civilians, part of the Mujahidin emerged under Talibani’s white flag from Qandahar and were welcomed by a large range of citizens, disillusioned from the government of the Mujahidin. A few years government of Talibani, living peaceful in the Islamic Emirate of Talibani regime, changed to the most absurd dream and people became more disappointed. At this time, the transition from Talibani regime to establishing a government based on democratic principles was the most desired hope for an Afghan to fulfill, a hope that soon changed to disappointment. Now that Ghani is president and Abdullah – owning half of political power – is chief executive of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the Afghan citizens are more frustrated than ever. After nine months of an administration of two well-dressed and badly-dressed politicians, insecurity is behind the gates of individual citizens and the economy has been paralyzed. It seems that Afghan people are sentenced to disillusionment and disappointment is their destiny.

Why do changing regimes always bring frustration? Maybe, the main reason is that changing regimes are without a political consciousness! Mostly, the changes are imposed from outside or from within by those who were not aware of the situation.

How a Protest in Afghanistan Instilled Hope for the Country’s Future

Written by: Shahzad Akhtar, director of Open Society Afghanistan
Published from: Open Society Afghanistan: https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/profile/how-a-protest-in-afghanistan-instilled-hope-for-country-s-future

Last Wednesday, I participated in the largest peaceful protests in Kabul’s recent history. Thousands of women and men marched in the cold and rain to demand justice, protection, and safety for all. We were there to protest the beheadings of seven innocent civilians, including a nine-year-old girl, all ethnic Hazaras.

It is not yet clear whether the beheadings were the work of the Talibani, ISIS, or other “foreign” forces. But whoever the killers were, they appeared to have sectarian motives. We protest, however, did not: thousands of Afghans from different ethnic and religious groups stood together against terrorism and religious extremism. There were parallel marches in Balkh in the north, Ninghar in the east, and Zabul in the south.

The Kabul protest was organized through Facebook and Twitter by youth and civil society leaders, rather than traditional ethnic “leaders,” who often play a divisive rather than unifying role. Organizers urged people to keep the protest inclusive and peaceful, to welcome all ethnic groups, and to not throw garbage on the streets. The night vigil leading to the protest and the march was somber and respectful, with people carrying candles, confetti, and photos of the victims. On the day of the protest, we called for justice and accountability, and expressed our anger at the brutality of the Talibani and ISIS, and our government’s failure to prevent it.

As a woman among the protesters, I felt absolutely safe, which is not how I feel on an average day in Kabul. Crowds of men gave way to women as we moved through the streets. Religious scholars and secular activists marched side by side. The usual divisions—urban and rural, secular and religious, old and young, male and female—melted away in the march. Identity remains a contentious issue in Afghanistan. The seven murdered civilians were Hazaras, an ethnic minority and a historically persecuted group. After the killings, social media buzzed with emotionally charged anger, with many saying that the largely Pashtun government had not done enough to help the kidnapped victims because of their ethnic identities.

Though identity has not been the defining feature of the recent conflict, many are concerned that Afghanistan’s fragile “unity” government could exacerbate these divisions. The structure of the government rewards ethnic “leaders” rather than prioritizing the needs of all citizens. Against this backdrop, we were worried about the potential for ethnic tension and hate speech at the march.

Instead, I saw the opposite: spontaneous acts of leadership and solidarity; young people calling for patience and cool-headedness; hundreds of male and female volunteers organizing the protests; and young journalists who had gone sleepless for 48 hours, providing continuous coverage for all the world to see.

There was a brief disruption late in the afternoon when a group of angry protesters climbed the security walls around the presidential palace. Security guards fired their guns in the air, and some people were injured. The incident ended minutes after it began. Predictably, some international media have chosen to highlight this short-lived incident at the expense of covering the rest of this historic, overwhelmingly peaceful protest.

I, and many other Afghans, learned a lot about ourselves yesterday. The interethnic nature of the protests shows that Afghans can work together to protect our common identity. This gives me hope that the discussion our country needs to have about ethnic and identity politics can take place inclusively and peacefully.

A new group of leaders is emerging that draws its legitimacy from its commitment to the safety and dignity of communities, not from pitting groups against each other. The demonstrators succeeded in having their concerns heard by person in the president and CEO of Afghanistan. And even now, the protests continue in places. Today, Pashtun women in the Ninghar province marched with signs reading “I am Pashtun Hazara,” mixing two ethnicities traditionally at odds with each other. The Afghan government has been shamefully incompetent when it comes to protecting the lives of civilians. That, unfortunately, won’t change overnight. However, the protests reinstalled a sense of hope and self-confidence in the Afghan people.

We are capable of organizing a peaceful demonstration dealing with the most difficult and painful issues of this country. We are capable of saying no, loud and clear, to terrorism despite the ongoing violence. Our government might fail us, but we will not fail each other.
A recent report from the World Bank about the situation of poverty in Afghanistan has been published. This report is the result of two separate surveys. The first survey was completed between 2007 and 2008 and the second was completed between 2011 and 2012. According to the report, on average, the gross domestic product in Afghanistan increased 6.9% from 2007 to 2012. However, this increase did not impact the poverty situation. For example, in 2006 36% of people were under the poverty line, but in the past four years, the situation did not change and the poverty line has remained the same as it was before.

Based on the World Bank report, economic growth has increased economic disparity. On average, consumption per capita has increased to 1.2 percent between 2007 and 2012, however, unequal distribution of consumption per capita increased the inequality among citizens. For example, approximately 20% percent of poor people during this period experienced a 2% decrease in their expenses, while 20% of the upper class experienced a 9% decrease.

According to the World Bank poverty map, rural areas in the country have the largest poor population, with four out of five poor people living in villages. More than 43% of poor people working in agriculture and most of them do not have access to their primary needs. Illiteracy is one of the poverty factors as nearly 75% of poor people are illiterate.

From the World Bank perspective, foreign investments have increased economic growth, although due to the lack of financial assistance, many people did not benefit. For example, a huge amount of investments were used in the services sector, and poor people lack the skills and education to be employed in this sector. In addition, the greatest beneficiaries of most international funds were insecure areas. However, poverty remains a problem, the human development index has increased. For instance, the literacy rate among people ages 15 years and above has increased 5% and the demand for primary school every year shows a 6% increase.

The World Bank in its report stated that although Afghanistan has experienced economic growth it will require 20 to 25 years to reach the same level of literacy rate among other low income countries affected by war. The report added that we still have a long way to eradicate the gap between poor and rich people. The World Bank suggests promotion of agriculture, investment on human resources, and management of risk reduction for eradication of poverty and equal distribution of financial aid.

The World Bank report, however, is not new and the report is from past years. But the figures show failure by Afghanistan and the international community. The World Bank reported from the years that Afghanistan was in its best situation as there were a huge amount of funds. Afghanistan had the support of the international community and had the best opportunity to eradicate poverty. Afghanistan had a golden time, but it was wasted. The opportunities were ruined, the rich became richer, and poor became poorer. The past has gone, but the future is still dark.

Distribution of more than two million textbooks has begun

The Ministry of Education announced that the distribution of 2.2 million textbooks which were printed at Afghan printing presses has begun. The distribution process that began on Saturday is expected to reach elementary and secondary levels textbooks.

Meanwhile, Mohammad Kabir Haqmal, from the Publication and Information Department of the Ministry of Education, said this administration needs more textbooks. However, he said that the Ministry of Education is burdened with budget cuts. For instance, the Ministry stated that the printing of textbooks will be completed at the cost of 7 million dollars and will be shipped to Afghanistan in one month. These books will include elementary, secondary and high school level textbooks.

Statement by UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka for International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women

Date: 20 November 2015

Editor’s note: This statement is reprinted in recognition of the #16days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence which runs from November 25th to December 10th.

Across the world, violence against women and girls remains one of the most serious—and the most tolerated—human rights violations, both a cause and a consequence of gender inequality and discrimination. Its continued presence is one of the clearest markers of societies out of balance and we are determined to change that. On this International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women we say again: it is not acceptable.

It is not inevitable.

It can be prevented.

Although there is no single solution to such a complex problem, there is growing evidence of the range of actions that can stop violence before it happens, especially if they are implemented in parallel. Further research currently underway will lead to more definitive strategies and interventions to prevent violence. We believe that, through concerted action by everyone involved, from governments to individuals, we can tackle the unequal power relations and structures between men and women and highlight the necessary attitudinal, practice and institutional changes.

Imagine how different the world would be for girls growing up now if we could prevent early marriage, female genital mutilation, the turning of a blind eye to domestic violence, abusive text messages, the impunity of rapists, the enslavement of women in conflict areas, the killing of women human rights defenders, or the hostility of police stations or courtrooms to women’s testimony of experiences. We have made progress in improving the laws that distinguish these acts and others as ones of violence and invasion of human rights. Some 125 countries have laws against sexual harassment, 119 have laws against domestic violence, but only 52 countries have laws on marital rape.

We know that leaders, whether CEOs, Prime Ministers, or teachers, can set the tone for zero tolerance to violence. Community mobilization, group interventions for both women and men, educational programmes and empowerment of women are some of the interventions that have impact, when they are put together with other legal, behavioural and social changes. For example, in Uganda, engaging communities in discussion of unequal power relations between men and women chopped rates of physical violence by men against their partners by half. In Myanmar, provision of legal aid services for rural women is improving access to justice and the training of even a small group of male leaders has been identified as contributing to a change of behaviour in some 40 per cent of those in the target communities.

We are doing pre-deployment training for peacekeepers to be more gender sensitive and to better protect civilian populations in conflict areas. And in the United States, urban police officers trained to recognize the warning signs of intimate partner violence, are making some progress in reducing the numbers of murdered women. As we launch the Orange the World Campaign today, we already know that talk-talk drivers in Cambodia, soccer stars in Turkey, police officers in Albania, school children in South Africa and Pakistan, and hundreds of thousands of others around the world, are all in their own way taking a stand.

We have now, for the first time, explicit targets to eliminate violence against women and girls in the Sustainable Development Goal we are working to achieve. These demand accelerated action. When more than 70 world leaders took the podium in New York at the Global Leaders’ Meeting on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment on 27 September 2015, the majority named ending violence against women and girls as a priority for action. It is indeed a priority.

I believe that if we all work together: governments, civil society organizations, the UN system, businesses, schools, and individuals mobilizing through solidarity movements, we will eventually achieve a more equal world—a Planet 50-50—where women and girls can and will live free from violence.

Reproduced from: UNWomen.org at http://www.un.org/800x600
On November 20th, Star Educational Society hosted an exciting event to celebrate the official inauguration of Star’s weekly newspaper, the Interstellar Bulletin. The program began with Mr. Habibi’s melodious Qur’an recitation and a musical performance by Star’s talented tableau members to warmly welcome audience members to Star’s rich program. Ali Reza Yasa, the Star’s founder, gave thanks to Star teachers and credited them for Star’s achievements. He also introduced Star’s Institute of World Languages which is on the cusp of its creation.

The event became more somber when the second tableau group sang a song of sorrow for the travelers from Zabul who were recently murdered. Then Soheila Noori read her emotional short story about Rokhshana, the young victim of a recent stoning in Ghor Province. As a result, the audience members were reminded of their sense of responsibility and moral duty to break the cycle of these ongoing situations.

Recognizing the hard work and achievements of students, Star recently initiated the “Best Students” of the semester award. New awardees, Amir Khan Babaie from A Branch, Kamila Sultani from B Branch, Amina Mohammadi from C Branch and Salma from Star High School were invited to the stage, presented with trophies and received thunderous applause from enthusiastic audience members.

Shortly after, the Interstellar Bulletin contributors were honored for their efforts with Certificates of Appreciation. Then Mohammad Reza Sharifi announced Interstellar’s essay contest winners. The theme of the contest was “Be the change you want to see in the world.” Contestants submitted essays and were scored by a panel of nine judges on creativity, adherence to topical, structure, grammar and the “wow” factor. The four runners-up were Mohammad Asif, Halima Habibi, Murtaza Qasemi, and Jumakhan Rahyab, who were each presented with appreciation certificates. The third place winner was Rubaba Raha. Only two finalists remained on the stage. Their hearts bounced rapidly, the crowd was in suspense waiting for the final results. Finally, it was announced… second place went to Ahmad Murtaza Ahmadi and the first place winner of Interstellar’s first essay contest was Waheed Hadeed, narrowly beating Ahmadi with a score of 279 to 277.

The next part of the program was a charming performance of “Twinkle, Little Star” by some of Star’s younger students. Following their performance, Ustad Daoud Naji delivered a thoughtful and humorous speech. He applauded the young generation and credited them for bringing life to Kabul and creating a rich and vibrant community. He mentioned how the young generation poured onto the streets of Kabul and demanded justice for the seven civilians from Zabul who were recently beheaded by terrorists. He believes these efforts shook the foundation of the national unity government and he encouraged young people to continue with their struggles.

The celebration culminated with the distribution of certificates for graduated students from the Computer and TOEFL courses who were greeted with enthusiastic applause by those present in the hall. Then graduates of the Teacher Training course were introduced and certificates were distributed to them by the guests of honor. Finally, the rich and meaningful event was brought to a close with words of appreciation to the audience for the warmth of their presence which helped to make the program more luminous and rewarding.

Celebrating Interstellar’s inauguration, contest winners, “best students,” graduates and more

Written by: Murtaza Qasemi
An excerpt from:

THE PROPHET

By Khalil Gibran

Houses

THEN a mason came forth and said, Speak to us of Houses.

And he answered and said:

Build of your imaginings a bower in the wilderness ere you build a house within the city walls. For even as you have home-comings in your twilight, so has the wanderer in you, the ever distant and alone.

Your house is your larger body.

It grows in the sun and sleeps in the stillness of the night; and it is not dreamless.

Does not your house dream? and dreaming, leave the city for grove or hilltop?

Would that I could gather your houses into my hand, and like a sower scatter them in forest and meadow.

Would the valleys were your streets, and the green paths your alleys, that you might seek one another through vineyards, and come with the fragrance of the earth in your garments.

But these things are not yet to be.

In their fear your forefathers gathered you too near together.

And that fear shall endure a little longer.

A little longer shall your city walls separate your hearths from your fields.

And tell me, people of Orphalese, what have you in these houses?

And what is it you guard with fastened doors?

Have you peace, the quiet urge that reveals your power?

Have you remembrances, the glimmering arches that span the summits of the mind?

Have you beauty, that leads the heart from things fashioned of wood and stone to the holy mountain?

Tell me, have you these in your houses?

Or have you only comfort, and the lust for comfort, that stealthy thing that enters the house a guest, and then becomes a host, and then a master?

Ay, and it becomes a tamer, and with hook and scourge makes puppets of your larger desires.

Though its hands are silken, its heart is of iron.

It lulls you to sleep only to stand by your bed and jeer at the dignity of the flesh.

It makes mock of your sound senses, and lays them in thistledown like fragile vessels.

Verily the lust for comfort murders the passion of the soul, and then walks grinning in the funeral.

But you, children of space, you restless in rest, you shall not be trapped nor tamed.

Your house shall be not an anchor but a mast.

But it shall not be a glistening film that covers a wound, but an eyelid that guards the eye.

Though its hands are silken, its heart is of iron.

It grows in the sun and sleeps in the stillness of the night; and it is not dreamless.

Although, Ali’s family called him. He didn’t answer his phone. They called his friend. He didn’t pick up either. The friend called back later. Ali was dead. Ali was one in a group of employees killed by a Taliban suicide bomber. It was his last day at work before his return home. It was his last day and there was to be no return.

Ali never got to see his new-born daughter.

Days later, your auntie, Khalil’s mom, went to attend Ali’s funeral.

*Baaja = Sister-in-law’s husband
*Kharji = Westerner

Khalil Gibran, philosophical essayist, novelist, poet and artist, was born on January 6, 1883, in Bsharri, Lebanon. He immigrated with his parents to Boston in 1895, and later settled in New York City. His works, written in both Arabic and English, are full of lyrical outpourings and express his deeply religious and mystical nature. Khalil Gibran wrote The Prophet (1923), a book of poetic essays, achieved cult status among American youth for several generations. Gibran died in New York City on April 10, 1931. The Prophet is a book of 26 prose poetry essays written in English by the Lebanese artist, philosopher and writer Khalil Gibran. It was originally published in 1923 and is Gibran’s best known work. The Prophet has been translated into over 40 different languages and has never been out of print.

Khalil Gibran

(1883–1931)

GIBRAN’S MASTERPIECE

Illustrated with twelve full-page drawings by the author

Alfred A. Knopf, Publisher, New York

**Khariji = Westerner**

**Baaja = Sister-in-law’s husband**

**Kharji = Westerner**
American educator volunteers in Afghanistan

An interview with Ian Pounds, former Volunteer Education Coordinator for the Afghan Child Education and Care Organization

Please introduce yourself briefly. I am Ian Pounds. I was a volunteer in Kabul at the Afghan Child Education and Care Organization (AFCECO) parwarishga (foster haven) and I taught over 300 students and organized fundraising for AFCECO. I led two groups of students on an American experience. You can see a movie I made of one of these visits at this YouTube address: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QjCeUgS2bw4. I also gave leadership classes to older boys and girls. Here is the address of a movie I made of the leadership class and helping young women in Afghanistan: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1_JQ0lGhQ. I led them in songs and drama. I visited Jalalabad, Herat, Mazar i Sharif, and climbed up into the Nuristan mountains to a small mountain village and met with the elders there. I was chased away by a fatwa that threatened my life. I am now teaching at the Asian University for Women in Bangladesh.

What was your perspective about Afghanistan before you arrived and how did you find Afghans in the four years of your stay? Before I came to Afghanistan I was influenced by the media that reported the nation was at war and full of terrorists. I left the American Dream behind and found real freedom and love inside the parwarishgas. I learned all about Islam and how it is the most democratic of all religions. I fell in love with Afghanistan and the Afghan people and continue to stay in touch with all my students and AFCECO. I found real happiness there.

Please share one of your memories from Afghanistan. I learned that children are hopeful and understand true democracy. Pashtun fell in love with Hazara fell in love with Tajik fell in love with Nuristani fell in love with Kochi. They were all Afghan sisters and brothers. One big family. I remember most being in the classroom with the students and that was the most important time. I have written a book about my time in Afghanistan called “Undestroyed”.

What is your favorite Afghan food? The street kabob and Kubuli Pulao and Afghan bread.

What do you think of the political relationship between America and Afghanistan in the last decade? I believe America is using Afghanistan as a base next to all its enemies. It has never left a nation it invaded, and Vietnam is negotiating for a Naval Base for American ships. I believe that America has suffered 17 years of war that has reduced the people to no jobs, no economy, no real government. It has never left a nation it invaded, and Vietnam is negotiating for a Naval Base for American ships. I believe that America has suffered 17 years of war that has reduced the people to no jobs, no economy, no real government.

What does democracy mean to you and how do you evaluate it in Afghanistan? There is no real democracy in the world. Just because you have voting does not mean a democracy. I am worried that Afghanistan will be in war status for many more years. This all began when America worked with Saudi Arabia to bring Wahhabism to fight against the Soviets along with the warlords. They created the Taliban and Al-Qaeda and ISIS through their invasions of other countries.

What are the four things that you want to share about Afghanistan with the world? 1) Afghanistan is fighting for identity that has been taken away; 2) Afghanistan has suffered 17 years of war that has reduced the people to no jobs, no economy, no real government; 3) America is not helping Afghanistan by having military bases there; 4) Afghanistan needs other countries to leave it alone to solve its own problems.

What was your most memorable experience while in Afghanistan? All the time with my students is the most memorable experience of mine.

Please share a story of one of the orphans who made a big impression on you. On my first day of classes I had the older girls in my last class. I had been teaching all day from 8 am to 7 pm. I looked at my watch and it said 6:55 pm. I said the girls could leave. They discussed in Dari and then one of them said to me, “Sir, we want our five minutes of class.”

What was one of the main lessons you learned during your time in Afghanistan? Leadership to the older girls. We learned that leaders are not made, they are nurtured. Everyone has some leadership qualities that we have to nurture to see. They learned leadership from each other. I just gave them exercises to bring it out of them.