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2 million friends for Afghanistan

by John Dear

On the Road to Peace

This week, the U.S. war against the people of Afghanistan entered its 12th year. It's the longest war in our history, but you'd hardly know we've been at war or that we continue to kill Afghan civilians. But on top of this, few Americans realize Afghanistan has suffered almost continuous warfare for the last four decades. About 2 million Afghans have died over the last 40 years.

It's hard to imagine what the people of Afghanistan feel about this, because we are not permitted to hear their voices. We know so little about the Afghan people.

But a remarkable group of young people in Kabul who espouse nonviolence and call themselves the Afghan Peace Volunteers have decided to tell us what they think, how they feel and what they want us to do. Recently, they called upon the whole world to join their campaign for the end to the war on Afghanistan by signing their appeal, "Two Million Friends for Peace in Afghanistan."

Instead of anger or revenge for the ongoing killings, these young Afghan peacemakers want 2 million people around the world to sign their petition to the United Nations, calling for a ceasefire and an end to the U.S./NATO war on Afghanistan and to pledge their friendship to the people of Afghanistan. I urge you to visit their website, 2millionfriends.org, to sign on and join this historic campaign for peace.

"We are strangers to one another," the youth of Kabul write, "because we don't know each other yet. We haven't been able to share with you how, in Afghanistan, the loneliness of mutual killing is dividing Afghans over and above the loneliness of life. War is constantly closing in on us and our open mountains."

They continue:

There is a global awakening though, and as everyday Afghans, we're likewise awakening to the

reality that all wars are socio-economic, geo-political wars against the people.

We have unwisely assented to a global system which gives unjust authority and money to a few fellow human beings in governments or big businesses. This system tells us that we are ordinary folk, and that we don't understand.

But we're awakening. We understand that the world has a child dying from hunger every ten seconds. Our land gets taken away from us or purchased. We study hard but today's education makes our minds numb and we end up unemployed. Our mothers and infants die easily. We get threatened, imprisoned, or killed. The system makes us its subjects, and then frightens us into killing one another. Would others understand how dehumanizing or isolating that feels? How we perpetually look around the corner in hope for real friends?

We, the Afghan Peace Volunteers, are a grassroots group of ordinary, multi-ethnic Afghans seeking a life of nonviolence, equality, self-reliance and the unity of all people. As young people who make up 68% of the Afghan population, we want a better world!

We want the whole world to be borderless friends. We believe that every hand of friendship will be an act for freedom.

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Solidarity with one another, person by person, can change our unfair world. We wish for 2 Million friends, friends that would ask for the war to end.

Last Spring, when we had gathered in Kabul to remember Afghan war victims over the past four decades, a middle aged Afghan man was close to tears as he said, 'I won't be satisfied with remembering only the 9 children killed in Kunar province. I want us to remember all 2 million victims of war.'

War, politics, money and power can jail, destroy and kill people, but it can't jail, destroy or kill love. We ask to be friends, we ask that every human being's basic needs be met, and we ask for no more killing!

How we wish to live without war! How we wish for '2 Million Friends'!

Here's the petition/letter they want to send to U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon:

We are '2 Million Friends' from Afghanistan and around the world who want peace in Afghanistan.

We strongly urge the United Nations to broker a ceasefire in Afghanistan. We ask the United Nations to call on all the parties in conflict, including competing warlords and the Taliban, the Karzai government, regional players and NATO, to lay down their weapons.

Each day the violence continues means a continuing humanitarian disaster for the people of Afghanistan. It is time for the parties in conflict to seek non-military alternatives and work cooperatively to allocate the funds and resources necessary for a full reconstruction campaign in Afghanistan. The people of Afghanistan, especially Afghan mothers, cry out for the wars to cease and for their children to be fed and educated. We ask for their cries to be heard.

The Afghan Peace Volunteers are a grassroots group of ordinary, multi-ethnic Afghans who seek a life of nonviolence, equality, self-reliance and the unity of all people. They have met with Dr. Sima Samar,

Chairperson of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission. Together with international friends, they are calling on people around the world to become friends for peace in Afghanistan on December 10th, 2012, the International Day of Human Rights. Nobel Laureate Mairead Maguire will join them for events in Afghanistan.

We believe that a negotiated ceasefire initiated by the United Nations will greatly assist Afghans in their wish to end the war. A ceasefire will pave the way for negotiations, reconciliation and the important responsibility to meet the humanitarian and socioeconomic needs of 30 million Afghans. We await your response with hope.

Sincerely, for the ordinary people of Afghanistan,

The Afghan Peace Volunteers and 2 Million Friends

I urge you to visit 2millionfriends.org, sign the petition, send it out to our friends, publicize their website and try to get as many people as possible to sign their peace petition.

Together, let's reach out and shake the hand of friendship that the young peacemakers of Afghanistan have offered and do what we can to help end the evil U.S. war on Afghanistan and promote a new world of peace, love and nonviolence.

On Oct. 28, John Dear will give a talk about *Lazarus, Come Forth!* at Maryknoll in Ossining, N.Y. To see John's 2012 speaking schedule, go to John Dear's website. His new book, *Lazarus, Come Forth!*, explores Jesus as the God of life calling humanity (in the symbol of the dead Lazarus) out of the tombs of the culture of war and death. John's talk at last year's Sabeel conference in Bethlehem is featured in the new book *Challenging Empire*. John is profiled with Dan Berrigan and Roy Bourgeois in a new book, *Divine Rebels* by Deena Guzder (Lawrence Hill Books). This book and other recent books, including *Daniel Berrigan: Essential Writings*; *Put Down Your Sword* and *A Persistent Peace*, are available from Amazon.com.

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