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'We do not want war': the plea of Afghan youth

John Dear | Dec. 4, 2012 On the Road to Peace

Before leaving this week for Afghanistan, I was able to interview some of the young peacemakers with whom I will be staying in Kabul. They are dedicated to nonviolence and serve the needy in their neighborhood. I asked them about their situation and their hopes. Here is what they wrote:

"We hope this war will end soon."
From Abdulhai, a teenager originally from Bamiyan, now studying in Kabul:

War has had many negative effects on me. I cannot study very well, and because of warfare over the last 30 years, my family members are not very happy. Every family has lost loved ones. They are always thinking about death, remembering their losses.

We do not want this war to continue. We hope that this war will end soon and that all people will live together and share their humanity together, regarding each other as a human being. Our country has had warfare for over 30 years. In our mind, we are always thinking about war; our memories of war never leave us. If I could describe my mother's feeling to you, it is 100 times stronger than my feelings against war. My mother is afraid that I will die because of the war, and she has always been afraid of this. Her husband was killed by the Taliban, and she is worried about how she will find bread to feed the family.

In Kandahar, the people cannot go to school. The U.S. built a school, and then some group destroyed it because they are not happy that the U.S. is here. In Kandahar, where there has been fighting, they seem to build more schools than in Bamiyan, where there hasn't been fighting. Why?

Some people in other countries think that the people of Afghanistan are wild, that all of us are like the Taliban. I ask those people to come here to Afghanistan and meet ordinary Afghans and learn about their lives and hear our experiences because of this war.

The government of the U.S. says that it is here to defend the rights of women. I do not think that's true. There are many women here who killed themselves because of the effects of war and because they experience no improvement in their lives. The U.S. remains in Afghanistan for its own benefit. If they stay here, they can control Iran, Pakistan, Russia and China.

Here in Kabul, the U.S. fixes the roads it uses for its own purposes. It does not build roads for the people. All the people know that the U.S. is doing those things. Similarly, they fixed a big bridge for themselves to use. They send big tanks over the bridges they build. But they have no idea about the people who live near the roads they build. People live in homes without toilets and it causes great environmental problems. The U.S., Iran, Pakistan and all of the countries that come to Afghanistan aren't interested in helping ordinary people. They are only playing games for themselves. That game is about making money.

Three or four percent of the people in Afghanistan benefit from this, and they control the money. The leaders

are always cheating the people, saying, "We will do this" or "We will do that," but they don't do anything. They just take money from the U.S. war. The rich can buy anything. They are benefitting from the war. The leaders of Afghanistan are even ready to kill each other in order to make money.

I don't know what will happen in the future, but I know the people need to stand together, to insist on their rights, and to say, "We are human, like everyone else," just as the people in Egypt did. I hope people will change their mind about Afghanistan.

"Killing is not the answer."
From Ghulamai, a teenager from Bamiyan, now studying in Kabul:

War has caused many psychological problems for our people. When the war was going on in Bamiyan province and we traveled in the snowy mountains, we had a very hard time. There wasn't enough food for the animals, and some of them died. My father had a business selling cows, sheep and donkeys.

I don't want the U.S. to remain in Afghanistan. Killing is not the answer. War doesn't bring trust. War does not bring love and friendship.

I am very afraid of war. I feel afraid because of the kidnappings, the suicide bombings and the U.S. convoys traveling along the road. Whenever the U.S. military travels along a road in the city, the phones do not work. Everything is cut. Meanwhile, many people steal because they have nothing to eat. This is because of the desperation in war.

"We do not want this war."
From Raz, a teenager from Wardak province, now studying in Kabul:

We do not want this war. War has no positive results. It does not build our future. The weapons are bad for the environment. War does not give us any hope. It's not a good start for the next generation. Older people should think about the next generation and do something good for the new generation. Half of our thinking is about war. The other half of our thinking focuses on studies or other life issues. It is 50-50. War has many bad effects on people. For example, we can't comfortably cook food because of war. Our minds are outside of the kitchen. All of the consequences of war are negative.

Because of many years of war, people everywhere have lost at least one person from their family, and now all of these people are ready for revenge. Both old and young people want revenge, but they are not willing to fight, and this causes suffering in their hearts. They think life lacks meaning for them because of this war. We know that every suffering caused by the murder of a loved one is carried by the loved ones, and it is very hard.

The first time the U.S. entered Afghanistan, they said they came for friendship. But it wasn't true.

We don't know who the Taliban are. We don't know what they want from the government or from the ordinary people. People in the U.S. think all Afghans are terrorists. In a village, we can find people who are loving but who do not know how to share their love with others. When a U.S. soldier goes to a village, ordinary people in the village think the U.S. soldiers are terrorists. There's no trust between the U.S. military and the people of Afghanistan.

Education is very important. Education can bring nonviolence. Without education, no one knows what nonviolence is.

"We have seen a lot of violence."

From Ali, a teenager from Bamiyan, now studying in Kabul:

War has many effects on our lives. I cannot study. While I'm trying to study, I start to think about people in other provinces. We in Afghanistan haven't seen a lot of love. We have seen a lot of violence.

My education is not good because of the war. I am 16 years old and should be in 10th grade, but now I am in seventh grade.

Everything that I hear about Afghanistan from other places is negative, and I myself don't see many positive things here.

How has the war changed my family? Because of the war, there has been no work. Our family sits together and one person asks another, "Why didn't you bring bread?" Everyone feels stress, high stress, and this is a cause of violence.

Before working with the peace volunteers, I didn't understand much about friendship and nonviolence. Before I would say, "I love you," but it was just words. But my actions were different. I never loved another person. Now I have changed. My heart says, "I should love other people," and my actions for others are getting better. My vision is much different now.

Education is necessary. All the people should study very hard. We need to educate one another in the way of nonviolence and work for peace. When we are safe and everyone is doing their own work, keeping busy, without war, maybe then there will be peace. In the future, perhaps 30 years from now, I hope peace will come. Maybe by then they will be tired of killing.

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John Dear is in Afghanistan on a peacemaking mission for several weeks. He will lead a retreat, "Jesus the Peacemaker [1]," April 5-7 in Pennsylvania. To see John's speaking schedule or to invite him to speak in your church or school, go to John Dear's website [2]. One of John's essays appears in the new book *A Faith Not Worth Fighting For [3]*. His book *Lazarus, Come Forth!* [4] 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 the 2011 Sabeel conference in Bethlehem is featured in the new book *Challenging Empire* [5]. John is profiled with Dan Berrigan and Roy Bourgeois in a new book, *Divine Rebels* [6] by Deena Guzder (Lawrence Hill Books). This book and other recent books, including *Daniel Berrigan: Essential Writings [7]*; *Put Down Your Sword [8]* and *A Persistent Peace [9]*, are available from Amazon.com.

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