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‘War-based economy’ a key challenge - Bowden

Mark Bowden is one of the Secretary-General's Deputy Special Representatives for Afghanistan. In his role, Mr. Bowden works closely with the national government to advocate the interests and mandates of the UN system in Afghanistan. Coordinating development operations promotes more strategic support for national plans and priorities, makes operations more efficient and reduces transaction costs for governments, which, in turn, helps the UN to be a more relevant and reliable partner for governments. He also wears other hats – serving as the UN Humanitarian Coordinator and UN Resident Coordinator.

He served as the UN Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator for Somalia for almost five years before coming to Afghanistan in November 2012. Prior to that he had served with UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs at UN Headquarters in New York and with UN operations in Sudan, as well as with the UK Government and the non-governmental organization, Save the Children.

UNAMA recently spoke with Mr. Bowden about his work as UN Resident Coordinator in Afghanistan.

UNAMA: Where does Afghanistan stand in terms of its development?

Mark Bowden: Afghanistan is amongst the lowest countries in terms of development indicators, partly because conflict always affected Afghanistan's development. It is low in the normal economic indicators in terms of the economy, and also in terms of the human development indicators



The Secretary-General's Deputy Special Representative, Mark Bowden. (Photo: Fardin Waezi)

with high rates of mortality, child mortality – a lot of the social indicators are very poor. So in many cases, like Somalia, it is pretty much at the bottom of international development.

UNAMA: Given the specific security and political situation in the country, how important is development in Afghanistan?

Mark Bowden: Development is essential for Afghanistan, but I think we need to really outline what sort of development we mean. First of all, one of the pri-

orities of development is to move Afghanistan from a very imbalanced economy, which is primarily what I would describe as a boom-bust economy.

A good harvest, you have high growth; a bad harvest, you have very low growth. Most of the population is caught up or dependent on the agriculture sector. So economic development requires a move towards a more stable pattern of economic growth which actually provides job opportunities and development opportunities across the board, and recog-

nizes one of Afghanistan's real problems at the moment, which is a very high rate of urbanization. The second development challenge is to start addressing the human development indicators – particularly the health and mortality indicators – and that requires economic growth and sustainable incomes, but it also requires the development of government services and the better delivery of basic services to the population as a whole.

UNAMA: What is the role of
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the UN in Afghanistan's development?

Mark Bowden: The UN has a variety of roles. Part of my role is to facilitate the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework, which is there to, basically, try and bridge the gap in finances in aid and development that will arise from the departure of international forces. For that, the UN's role is quite important in making sure that we get a sustained and balanced international donor response to meet Afghanistan's long-term development needs. Part of the job of coordination is also, as we move to the transition, to ensure that every part of the country gets access to development assistance and support.

The other role I play is as a Resident Coordinator here, and there my task is to coordinate the UN agencies funds and programmes. We have 23 UN organizations working here across the board; they contribute to Afghanistan's development in number of different ways.

First of all, they provide technical support to the Government to help it expand its capacity to deliver services and to support development. Secondly, they provide what I will call a normative framework, a policy framework. For example, WHO (the World Health Organization) sets the international regulations around the use of pharmaceuticals and health care, UNICEF (the UN Children's Fund) sets international standards around the protection of children. So the UN plays a very important role in standard-setting to ensure that there is capacity to move forward in development, but also that there is recognition and understanding of international standards. Thirdly, the United Nations is a significant donor in its own right, and at least \$2 billion goes through UN agencies into Afghanistan – what the UN agencies also do is get access for Afghanistan to funds that are internationally available. So, for example, the Global Environment Fund, which is accessed through both UNEP (the UN Environment Programme) and UNDP (the UN Development Programme), brings in money for the environment and addressing environmental issues in the country. Another example is the fund called GAVI (the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization) which covers the cost of immunization in the country as a whole. So, overall the United Nations is a very important organization and collection of organizations in contributing to Afghanistan's development.



UNAMA's Sayed Mohammad Shah interviews Mr. Mark Bowden. (Photo: Fardin Waezi)

UNAMA: Could you also shed some light on the role of international donors in the development of Afghanistan? Are they happy with the progress of Afghanistan in terms of development?

Mark Bowden: The international donors are, at the moment, focused on providing assistance through the Tokyo Framework and they will measure the way in which Afghanistan meets its commitments under the Tokyo Framework in terms of the level of support they give. So Afghanistan is in a group of countries that are involved in what is called the 'New Deal.' This is a new way of looking at aid, which accepts that there is a compact, that there is an agreement between both the donor community and the Government, and both parties have conditions they have to meet in terms of addressing Afghanistan's problems. The idea is that in times of conflict and post-conflict, they use this process as a way of moving towards a better longer-term, a more stable development strategy. So the Government's happiness and donors' happiness is measured by how far they are meeting the conditions they both set for each other when they signed the Tokyo Framework.

UNAMA: What do you see as main challenges for Afghanistan's development?

Mark Bowden: I think the main challenges are to move away from what I would call a 'war-based economy' to a more stable economy. At the moment the cost of the national security forces, even with the external assistance, are going to be the major drain on the Government and its revenues.

We are going into a time when

government revenues are not growing sufficiently to meet the longer-term demands we based on them by maintaining high levels of security forces. It really is important for Afghanistan to move towards a more sustainable model of development where there is better economic growth, diversification of the economy without heavy dependence on agriculture and also a better devolution of responsibilities to provincial levels, which will enable more activities to take place in the field, at the provincial and district levels. At the moment, because of the difficulties of implementing development activities, both for security but also for capacity reasons, a lot of development initiative get stuck in Kabul.

If you want to see balanced development, we have to tackle those three things: addressing the issues of peace and security so there is more government revenue that can be spent on the delivery of services and that is currently tied up in paying armed forces; diversifying the economy to reduce the threat of a boom-bust economy that is very heavily dependent on the agriculture sector; and devolving, to a certain extent, development to the provinces and to the districts so that we see more development activity and more infrastructure development taking place in the country.

UNAMA: UN agencies, funds and programmes have been in Afghanistan for some 60 years now. How do you see their role after 2015?

Mark Bowden: I think UN agencies, funds and programmes are here for the long-term and develop programmes on that basis.

What we are trying to do

amongst the UN agencies, funds and programmes is tackle some of the issues where we think we have a specific added value – one of those will be to address the issues of youth because Afghanistan is going through the issue of youth bulge at the moment in population terms, and there is real danger that stability will be affected by a lot of younger people with no access to jobs and with rising expectations. That is one of the challenges that I think UN agencies are trying to tackle.

Urbanization is other big problem, and with that, the high level of displacement that is also taking place here – displaced populations are the number of people who have been displaced either by conflict or economic reasons – their number is actually growing. I think in the UN we have a specific responsibility and capacity to address those issues.

We will also be focusing on moving towards supporting the rule of law in a general way. By the rule of law, I mean, for example, peoples' right to property. A lot of civil law issues have tended to be ignored, but actually cause more problems for everybody in day-to-day life. I think as we move toward the post- 2015 period, the UN will try to make itself far more relevant to the needs of the country but also, probably, reduce a bit in size because I think money will be less available in 2015, and concentrate on improving the value the people of Afghanistan can get out of their engagement with the United Nations.

UNAMA: You have worked in many other countries, particularly in Africa. How does Afghani-

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stan compare in terms of development?

Mark Bowden: Every country is different. African economies have a high dependence on different sources of natural resources and exports; so it depends on the economy. Somalia was dependent on its trading economy. Afghanistan has some similarities. Afghanistan is also at the crossroads between countries and is, to some extent, a trading economy. The other challenges that poor countries faced were highly centralized governments that captured the development assistance in the capital and that's a similar phenomenon.

I think rather than comparing Afghanistan with African countries, it is important to look at Af-

“Afghanistan’s culture has made the biggest impression on me – it has a society that has both a lot of hospitality and a very strong sense of its identity.”

ghanistan as one of the countries in the ‘New Deal.’ Some of the ‘New Deal’ countries are in Asia, some are in Africa. The common theme for them is that they are emerging from conflict. The ‘New Deal’ recognizes that when you emerge from conflict you have distortions in the economy, you have to address the issues of public finance management, of transparency and of accountability. And Afghanistan is, in some ways,

trying to lead these countries by example through the aid framework we developed here.

UNAMA: You have spent almost a year in Afghanistan. What has made the biggest impression upon you so far?

Mark Bowden: Afghanistan’s culture has made the biggest impression on me – it has a society that has both a lot of hospitality and a very strong sense of

its identity, with a very impressive history, a culture to be very proud of, both in terms of its history and the archeology of the country.

The landscape and scenery also make a big impression on me. I’m lucky to travel and have seen how the country is dominated by its landscape and its development is affected by the difficulties created in this landscape. Those are the things that make the biggest impression on me.

Having worked in countries experiencing conflict in the past, I am not so worried about the conflict-side of things, but I recognize that this is somewhere where you need patience and you need to take a long-term view because conflict takes a long time to recover from. ■

Socio-demographic survey rolls out in Kabul

Preparations are underway to roll out a socio-demographic and economic survey in Kabul Province, with the aim of collecting reliable data which can help guide the development policies and programmes of the Afghan Government and its international partners.

The Central Statistic Organization (CSO) will conduct the survey with the technical support of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) starting from mid-November 2013.

The Assistant Representative of UNFPA in Afghanistan, Younas Payab, said that the survey will help acquire accurate data about categories such as age and sex distribution of the population, access to safe drinking water, education and literacy status, school enrolment, employment status, birth and child mortality and number of households.

“This information will be used for social and economic development planning of the different districts and villages of the Kabul province,” said Mr. Payab.

Afghanistan does not have reliable data on the social, political and economic status of its population, which has hindered effective development planning. According to UNFPA, the Bonn Agreement in 2001 emphasized the need for conducting a census in Afghanistan, with this need becoming more crucial during the rebuilding and development phase in subsequent years. An effort was made in August 2008 to conduct a national census in Afghanistan but, due to insecurity, the Afghan Government postponed the exercise.



Kabul has the biggest population among Afghanistan’s cities. (Photo: Fardin Waezi)

In August 2010, a group of census experts met in the Turkish city of Istanbul to discuss the possibility of a census in Afghanistan and agreed upon a province-by-province census.

Currently, the CSO is training some 3,000 survey staff, all of whom have been hired from the areas that they will operate in.

“Kabul is a big province, so we have at least three rounds of training,” said the Deputy Director of CSO, Haseeb Mohid. “Two rounds of training have already been completed while the third is ongoing.”

In the initial phase of the survey project, besides the appointment of staff and their training, 274 cartographers – who have already been trained – will undertake a mapping exercise with the help of Global Positioning System equipment at the district and municipal council levels and prepare lists of families and district maps. The lists and maps will be handed over to surveyors, who will start the survey during the month of November. The survey is expected

to be completed in three months.

After the completion of data collection, the data will be processed, analyzed and arranged at the levels of village, district and province.

“All standard indicators that are used in censuses internationally have been considered in the survey,” said Mr. Mohid.

UNFPA technical staff will assist the CSO with the preparation of a questionnaire for the survey, mapping exercises, software design for data entry and processing, data analyzing and coding, as well as the formulation of the report through explanatory graphs and matrixes.

“This data will be the manifestation of the social and economic status of the people in Kabul Province and it can help tremendously in the Government’s development planning and donors’ assistance,” said Mr. Payab.

According to the CSO, the final report of the socio-demographic and economic survey is expected by May 2014. The data will be

handed over to authorities at the municipal, district, provincial and national levels for their development planning.

This socio-demographic and economic survey in Kabul is part of a series of such surveys planned to be conducted throughout Afghanistan, province-by-province, by 2016.

The survey was conceptualized by CSO in 2011 with the aim to collect socio-demographic and economic data at the district level, province-by-province. The first survey was conducted in Bamyan province due to the relatively stable security conditions there. Subsequently, the survey was conducted in Dai Kundi and Ghor provinces, before its impending rollout in Kabul. After its completion there, the survey will be conducted in the central provinces of Parwan and Kapisa.

The CSO has made an appeal to the people of Kabul to take an active part in the survey by providing true, accurate and well-thought answers to the surveyors. ■

International Youth Day marked with music concert

Afghanistan marked International Youth Day this year with a free outdoor concert in the central province of Bamyan, drawing an audience of thousands to the grounds beneath the world-famous caverns where giant stone Buddha carvings once stood.

Organized by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) with the strong support of provincial leaders, including the provincial Governor, Habiba Sarabi, the four-hour event in mid-August brought together leading Afghan musicians from around the country for a rousing display of cultural unity and national solidarity.

“Young people today belong to the largest generation of youth the world has known,” UNAMA’s Deputy Director for Communications, Ari Gaitanis, speaking on behalf of the Secretary-General’s Special Representative, Jan Kubiš, told the crowd of close to 10,000 people, some of them coming from as far as the southern province of Kandahar.

“For UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, working with and for young people is one of his top priorities,” Mr. Gaitanis added. “For International Youth Day, he has encouraged Member States, youth-led organizations and other stakeholders to act to promote the rights of all young people and maximize the development potential of youth around the world, including, of course, Afghanistan.”

The UN General Assembly endorsed in 1999 a recommendation made by the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth



A young Afghan rap singer performing during the Youth Day Concert. (Photo: Fardin Waezi)

that 12 August be declared ‘International Youth Day’. According to estimates, youth make up more than two-thirds of Afghanistan’s estimated population of 27 million.

Secretary-General Ban has previously expressed his commitment to working with youth and exploring how they can contribute more to creating a sustainable, equitable future of opportunity and dignity for all, while at the same time stressing how the world cannot afford to create a ‘lost generation’ of squandered talent and disenfranchised citizens.

“One of the responsibilities of my generation of leaders is to do more with and for you,” Mr. Ban told a youth forum in August. “To ensure that you have opportunities for decent work instead of low-wage, dead-end jobs – or no jobs at all. And even more than that, to ensure that you have a place at the negotiating table – to help shape the decisions that shape your lives.”

In his remarks to the concert, Bamyan’s Deputy Governor, Asif Mubaligh, urged youth to pursue education.

“Focus more on education to

garner medals and other accomplishments,” said Mr. Mubaligh, echoing similar remarks made by other local dignitaries and celebrities who addressed the start of the event.

The speeches were followed by the music. A dozen performers and groups took to the stage throughout the afternoon and evening, with musical styles ranging from traditional music played with rubabs and domburas to rock, pop and hip hop.

The concert kicked off with a set by a Bamyan-based singer, Surosh, who had the audience on its feet with a melodic appeal for national unity. “Let us no longer say or distinguish between Hazara and Pashtun,” she sang.

Although the concert focused on youth, those in attendance included a wide cross-section of Afghan society and covered all ages.

One of the audience members was a 21-year-old student from Kabul, Zakria Bigzad.

“We have come all the way from Kabul to participate in this music concert. We didn’t know about this day (International Youth Day); now we know that there is a day for us,” said Mr. Bigzad. “We got the messages of solidarity and harmony from the songs of today’s concert.”

Elsewhere in Afghanistan, UNAMA-supported events to mark International Youth Day included seminars and theatre per-



Youth Day posters are erected under the Buddha statues caves. (Photo: Fardin Waezi)

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formance, in addition to musical performances.

Addressing a conference which drew about 200 youth leaders in the western province of Herat, UN and government officials and civil society leaders highlighted the role of youth in Afghanistan's socio-economic and political development.

In her speech to the gathering, the head of the Herat provincial Department of Information and Culture, Aria Roafian, said the Youth Day event encouraged youth to work for a better future of Afghanistan.

The head of UNAMA's office in Herat, Andrew McGregor in his comments said: "I call on the government, the private sector, civil society and academia to keep the doors wide open for young people and to strengthen partnerships with youth-led organizations. Let us support the young people of Herat and Afghanistan so they grow into adults who raise generations of productive Afghan citizens and democratic leaders."

The conference, which was also addressed by youth role models – including the country's first female pilot – was followed by theatrical performances and a music concert by local artists.

At an event in eastern Laghman province, two young government officials were introduced as "role models" for Afghanistan's youth.



UNAMA's Ari Gaitanis addresses the audience. (Photo: F. Waezi)

One of them was the 32-year-old head of the provincial Department of Labour, Social Affairs,

and the Martyred and Disabled, Sayed Ahdul Basir Hashemi; the second was the head of the De-

partment of Information and Culture, Faizanullah Patan, also 32 years of age.

In their speeches, both of them highlighted the importance of young people helping strengthen national unity, and their involvement in peace and reconciliation efforts and the protection of human rights.

At another International Youth Day event, in the north-eastern province of Kunduz, speakers also emphasized the role of Afghanistan's young people in participating in political and peace-building processes.

A university lecturer, Muhammad Ismail Roshangar, urged the Afghan Government to invest more in young people. "Youth are the drivers of change," said Mr. Roshangar. "Invest on them and involve them in various aspects of the governmental."

In Gardez, the capital of south-eastern Paktya province, UNAMA co-hosted, along with provincial authorities and the Awoshtoon Cultural Society, a one-day seminar that explored ways to promote the role of youth in the country's socio-economic development. The event was attended by about 200 students from nearby high schools and Paktya University. Speakers called on youth to promote a culture of peace, find connections with the environment, work for the betterment of the community and respect their elders. ■



Audience members enjoy performances from some of Afghanistan's most well-known singers. (Photos: Fardin Waezi)

VOX POPULI

In this issue, UNAMA asked the following question to Afghans in different regions of the country: *“How can peace contribute to Afghanistan’s development?”*

Bamyan

Mohammad Arif, fruit seller

Without peace we cannot think of development and stability. Bamyan is peaceful and that’s why I can come to work every day without fear. When there is no peace, I cannot work and feed my family. We can see that many people are jobless because of a lack of factories and because our country is not peaceful – people do not invest in making factories, and without factories and enough job opportunities, Afghanistan will not progress and stability will not come.



Khost

Sher Rahman, fruit-seller

Peace ensures development and provides work opportunities. It means anti-government elements fail to recruit people, especially youth, in their efforts to sabotage stability. All sorts of businesses are related to the security situation. For example, I could work for longer hours than I do now and earn more as I would have more customers. Peace would also have a positive impact for my family members, helping facilitate our access to health and education services.



Balkh

Fazelrahman Fekrat, university student

Societies need constant change to adapt themselves to the needs of the day. They call it ‘improvement’ and it paves the way for development, and that means a better life. None of these is possible without peace. Failure of states and societies has always been due to instability and absence of peace. Peace protects freedom, democracy, unity, and prosperity. It’s the first step to development and Afghanistan is in dire need of it.



Kunduz

Hamid Tanha, currency exchange dealer

Peace is the need of our people. If we have peace and tranquility, our businesses can grow tremendously and our trade and economy can burgeon, resulting in the overall development of Afghanistan. In a peaceful atmosphere, we can extract and exploit Afghanistan’s minerals and our country could be self-reliant.



Kandahar

Nisar Ahmad Arya, youth activist

Peace is important for all mankind because in the absence of peace, a nation, a country, a society, even a family, will not have a prosperous and meaningful life. Peace is particularly important for Afghanistan and for Afghans, because, they have suffered miseries and destruction for the last three decades. Everyone wants peace in Afghanistan so that they can have a better future. That is why peace is a prerequisite for the development and stability of our beloved nation, in order to live in prosperity as other peaceful nations do around the globe.



Nangarhar

Anisa Emrani, director of women’s affairs

Instability and war give rise to unemployment and weaken the education system and the economy. These factors may drastically affect the rule of law and increase the level of corruption, robbery, abductions, civilian casualties, and, consequently, create huge obstacles towards development and prosperity. Considering these factors, in order to have development, peace and stability are must. In my opinion, the culture of peace can be started from home, by parents, especially, by mothers. Everyone can start at home by making efforts to bring up children with a mentality of non-violence, by giving them love and discouraging them from violence.



Paktya

Eid Gul, security guard

Peace guarantees that everyone’s life and interests are secure. It allows everyone to work for his own and his country’s development. Everyone – rich and poor, literate and illiterate, upper- and lower-class, men and women, Muslim and non-Muslim – can go anywhere for work and their livelihood. Peace paves the way for all sorts of development. Traders can trade, students and teachers can continue education, security organs can prevent crime, and there will be rule of law with the law enforced equally.



Herat

Mojde Rassoli, student

The main cause of conflict and insecurity in the country is due to lack of trust and unity among Afghans. If we can change this – even if we are speaking different languages and are from different tribes and ethnicities – we will have peace and stability in the country. To overcome the hardships and difficulties that Afghanistan and its people are suffering is a must for all of us, especially youths. It is important to inculcate in each person that peace really has a great impact in the improvement of our lives and the development of our country. Also, with peace we can convince Afghans living abroad to have faith in their country, to return and start investing in it and support its development, with all the knowledge that they have gained.



Replacing dust with colours on Kabul's walls

Shamsia Hassani is emerging as one of Afghanistan's most well-known graffiti artists.

During Afghanistan's civil war, her family had moved to Iran where she was born and brought up. The 24-year-old completed most of her schooling in Tehran and returned with her family to Afghanistan in 2005.

Since childhood, painting has been a passion for her. It prompted her enrolment at the Fine Arts Department at Kabul University, where she completed her studies and where she is now a teacher.

In 2010, along with other young artists, she attended a training workshop on graffiti which sparked her interest in the art form. She believes that graffiti can be a peaceful and effective form of art for highlighting social struggles, the expression of ideas, and bringing about positive changes in society.

One of the objectives of her graffiti is to remove and replace the signs of civil war from the walls around the Afghan capital of Kabul. She is also trying to spread interest in art by introducing the public to it on the city's streets, especially for those people who otherwise might not be exposed to it.

UNAMA recently spoke with Ms. Hassani about her work.

UNAMA: How did you get into graffiti art?

Shamsia Hassani: I have always had a talent for the arts, but I picked up my graffiti skills formally, through a training workshop in 2010. Before this workshop, I did not even know what graffiti was. I think I am among the first graffiti artists to work in Afghanistan. After the workshop, almost everyone quit this form of art – but I continued. I realized that this is the best way to introduce art to the people. This is an art for the people, because it is on the street and everyone can see it. Nowadays, many people have started painting graffiti in Afghanistan. I believe in it and I think I can bring a positive change to society through this form of art.

UNAMA: Where in Kabul City have you shown your graffiti art?

Shamsia Hassani: As you know, security is not good and the social conditions are often not conducive for me to work on the streets. But, whenever I get a chance, I practise my art. I have done some graffiti work on Darul-Aman road. Most of my work is in in-door places like at Skatistan, the Kabul Municipality office



Grffiti artist Shamsia Hassani. (Photo: Fardin Waezi)

walls, Kabul University, my home and the Russian Culture Centre – where my work was later wiped off – but, wherever a wall is available to me, I practise my art.

When I saw that, as a young Afghan woman, there are huge limitations placed on my work, I invented a new method. I started taking photographs of streets, markets and any building that attracted my attention. I would later print these photos in large sizes and in big frames and paint on the photographed walls with a brush. The title of this series of photograph works is 'Graffiti Dreams'. Of course they're not real as in on a wall, due to social constraints, but I just wanted a new way so that I could continue my graffiti work. So I work through these two methods: spray paint on walls, when I get the opportunity to do so; and when I don't, then by painting the walls of my photos.

UNAMA: You mentioned difficulties as an Afghan female artist. Could you elaborate?



Shamsia Hassani sketches on a wall. (Photo: Fardin Waezi)

Shamsia Hassani: Social conditions are such that it is not easy for women to go out and work. Sometimes it is the families that do not allow this; other times, people are stereotyped and do not understand the value of art and, perhaps, think that it is not allowed in Islam. Lots of people think it is not good for an Afghan girl to stand on the roadside and paint on walls. So collectively, these perceptions and stereotypes create limitations for Afghan girls to work outside. When I work on a roadside, I feel very uncomfortable and try to finish my work as soon as I can.

One day, I was passing through Shahr-e-Naw and I had a blue spray-paint can in my handbag. I found a dirty wall with many posters pasted on it. I decided to draw something on it. As soon I started spraying, a person started shouting: "Hey man, come out! Look! She is messing up your wall with that spray paint!" I was terrified and ran away. That man did

not even know what I was going to do there. I can still see my incomplete work on that wall in Shahr-e-Naw. When I work on the street, every other passing person makes some comments. If I record all their comments, it can make an interesting story book.

UNAMA: What topics inspire your graffiti work?

Shamsia Hassani: In each political transition in Afghanistan, a segment of society that suffered a lot was women. The role of women was diminished and, consequently, people forgot women as an element for social development. That is the reason why people can't accept it when women go out to work, because women haven't been active in the past. Now when people see some women going out and working, they wonder.

I want to highlight the role of women through my graffiti work. My message is that today's women are not the women of the past. They are now active, stronger and vibrant in all fields of life. I want people to see women differently through my artistic works.

UNAMA: Have you ever displayed your graffiti art outside of Afghanistan? If so, what has been the reaction?

Shamsia Hassani: I have shown my work in Vietnam, Australia, Germany, Switzerland, Iran and India. In coming weeks, I am planning to visit Denmark for a project there. Later, I will visit the United States, and it goes on. Most of these visits are in connection with training workshops organized by these countries, and to which I am invited to teach. While I'm there, they also arrange walls for me to show my art.

It is always very interesting for people in other countries to see that there is an Afghan woman who is a graffiti artist, because most people outside of Afghanistan only think of war and killings when they hear of my country. Afghanistan is known for violence, bomb blasts and other unpleasant things. But when they see that art and artists also exist in Afghanistan, it is very surprising for them.

I like travelling. It gives me an opportunity to portray a new image of Afghanistan to the world. I want to wash out the negative image of Afghanistan from peoples' minds. I want art to overshadow the conflict and colours to replace the dust in my country.

UNAMA: How do you see the

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future of arts in Afghanistan?

Shamsia Hassani: From the time my family and I returned from Iran, almost eight years ago, Afghanistan has made great advances in the field of arts. If time allows us, and if the political and social conditions allow us, we can be successful and move forward. Time is everything.

Sometimes, I think that Afghanistan was a person who died during the civil war and was reborn after 2001. I still think it is like a child who needs lots of support from the world. With the passage of time, I believe Afghanistan will grow stronger and there will be a time when it won't need any support from others. I am hopeful that the future is good; we need to be a little patient.

UNAMA: Do you have any message for Afghan women, particularly young female artists?

Shamsia Hassani: I usually



A group of Ms. Hassani's students practice graffiti art. (Photo: Fardin Waezi)

use burqa-wearing women as a symbol in my work. I think the freedom of Afghan women is not in removing their scarf or in

throwing away the burqas, rather, real freedom is in peace. A burqa might be a problem for women, but the main problems are insecur-

ity, social constraints, outdated customs and traditional perceptions towards women's role in the society. ■

UNESCO programme to promote peace education

In an effort to promote peace and human rights education across the country, the United Nations is working with the Government of Afghanistan to train 74,000 current or prospective teachers.

"In a country that has seen decades of war, peace education is important to give students and teachers the skills they need not only to resolve conflict but to build peace," said an education project officer with the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Dianne Harper Denton.

"The knowledge they gain and attitudes they develop through peace education will enable them to actively contribute to peace-building at the school, community, and national levels throughout their lives," she added.

UNESCO is working with the Teacher Education Department (TED) at the Afghan Ministry of Education (MoE) and the German international aid agency – Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) – to develop a curriculum for the peace and human rights education course for teachers. Of the 74,000 teachers involved, 54 per cent of them are women.

The course – taught at 44 Teacher Training Colleges (TTCs), 187 district-based Teachers' Development Centers and 64 satellite classes across the country – aims to develop

teachers' knowledge, skills, and attitudes of peace education and encourage positive behaviour change, enabling them to act as role models to their students and contribute to peace building in their classrooms, schools, and communities, according to UNESCO and TED.

The peace and human rights education is deemed particularly important for promoting a peace-building culture in Afghanistan, as the country's education system and children have long suffered due to violence and insecurity given the more than three decades of conflict.

The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) has previously expressed serious concern that the protection needs of civilians, especially children, and their right to education were being violated through attacks by anti-government elements targeting schools and education officials. The UN mission noted that it monitored an "unacceptable levels of violence" directed against schools, education institutions, their staff and students in 2011 and 2012.

"The course will enable the teachers of all subjects to promote peace-building behaviours, reflect on their own and their students' behaviour and learn to create a positive and enabling learning environment for their students," said TED's Razia Stanikzai, who is

working closely with UNESCO on the peace and human rights education programme.

"The teachers will be agents of change for peace with commitment to values such as inclusiveness, justice and respect to all students," Ms. Stanikzai continued. "Students will be able to handle conflicts effectively through peaceful conversation and negotiation within school and in their personal lives. They will learn to appreciate diverse perspectives and communicate and listen to each other in respectful manner."

The new curriculum for Afghan school-teachers includes practical pedagogy, classroom management, assessment, and evaluation techniques to support rights-based, inclusive education, according to UNESCO, which brings together a wide range of education partners to advocate on the needs for inclusive education in Afghanistan and to support the MoE and its staff in developing inclusive education policies and materials for teachers.

UNESCO's Education for Peace and Sustainable Development programme in Afghanistan focuses on a number of areas including on the promotion of the right to education, particularly on the promotion of culture of peace, by developing curriculum, syllabi, text books and other advocacy materials and publications of

peace education and sustainable development for the MoE.

"Contextualizing peace education to Afghanistan's historical, cultural, and religious context is being achieved in collaboration with a working group from the TED," said Ms. Denton.

In November 2013, a group of core master trainers will be trained on the curriculum. These master trainers will then train other trainers at provincial levels. Following two levels of further training at the local level, the fully trained school-teachers will implement the peace education curriculum in schools all over Afghanistan in early 2014.

UNESCO believes that education promotes tolerance. Preliminary findings of UNESCO's annual 'Education for All - Global Monitoring Report (EFA-GMR)', due to be released in January 2014, show that a secondary, rather than a primary education, increases tolerance towards people of a different religion or those speaking a different language. The report will present data to show how education can prevent conflict or heal its consequences by promoting tolerance, the UN agency notes on its website.

"Education helps people to understand democracy, promotes the tolerance and trust that underpin it, and motivates people to participate in the political life of their societies," it adds. ■