



PREVENTIVE DIPLOMACY ACADEMY

MESSAGES DELIVERED BY YOUNG PEOPLE AT THE FIRST GOVERNMENT-YOUTH DIALOGUE FOR CENTRAL ASIA AND AFGHANISTAN



14 December 2019, Tashkent

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Foreword



Dear Reader,

I am pleased to present this brochure with the messages of the young Ambassadors for Preventive Diplomacy, graduates of the UNRCCA Preventive Diplomacy Academy in 2019. Here you will find the messages of these young leaders from Central Asia and Afghanistan in their own words, as they were shared with the Deputy Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the five Central Asian states and Afghanistan on 14 December 2019 in Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

During this first Government-Youth Dialogue for Central Asia and Afghanistan, 25 young people stood in front of their Deputy Ministers and spoke on behalf of the young people of the region about the most pressing regional peace and security issues for their generation. I would like to remind you that people under the age of 29 represent half of the population of the region. Investing in these motivated young people, the leaders of today and tomorrow, is an investment in the prosperity of the region and in the world.

The messages are divided into five themes – intercultural exchange, youth participation in decision-making, the

fight against terrorism, gender equality and preservation of the region's water resources. Within the messages, the young leaders not only call for action by Governments and the United Nations but also highlight what they can do – and often already are doing – to drive change themselves.

It was extremely gratifying to see how welcoming the Deputy Foreign Ministers were of the young people and appreciative of the messages they heard. They confirmed the need for a direct dialogue with the young leaders and asked that the Government-Youth Dialogue continue.

Building on our success in 2019, I am pleased that the UNRCCA Preventive Diplomacy Academy will continue, and the second Government-Youth Dialogue will take place in the autumn of 2020.

Natalia Gherman
Special Representative of the Secretary-General,
Head of the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive
Diplomacy for Central Asia

Young Ambassadors for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia and Afghanistan

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MESSAGE 1: PROMOTING INTERCULTURAL EXCHANGE



The countries of Central Asia share many similarities. Therefore, additional opportunities for cultural exchanges and knowledge sharing among the young people in the region will improve the trust relationship between them.

In order to achieve effective results towards improving cultural understanding among young people in Central Asia and Afghanistan, countries in the region could create a single visa platform, called the "Central Asian Youth Visa." Facilitating the movement of young people from and within the region would create more opportunities for them to visit, study and learn about their neighbours. This would eventually raise their cultural awareness and eliminate prejudices. In addition, knowledge reduces the risk of young people falling under the influence of such groups who aim at the undermining of the political system, national values or peace and security in the region. In this regard, it would prove beneficial to national States to work at the national and local levels with young people to educate them about the proper, competent and positive use of materials and information on the internet.

There are many ways in which young people could contribute to preventing or at least decreasing cultural misunderstandings between the people of Central Asia and Afghanistan. We young leaders from the region came up with the following three ideas to improve cultural awareness and understanding among the people of the region:

1. Young and active people from Central Asia and Afghanistan could organize themselves in informal groups and share their culture through music, dance and local cuisine, explain and show historical monuments, language,



religion or values to other interested countries in the region. In this regard, national Ministries of Culture, cultural associations, universities and private and non-governmental organizations can support financially and in other ways the organization of such intercultural exchanges. Such activities could eventually contribute to youth unity in the region.

2. Business also plays an immense role in promoting cultural identity. Opening a business in another country requires knowledge about the relevant rules, laws, principles and business architecture in the respective country. Therefore, if young people are given more opportunities to start their own business throughout the region, it would increase their familiarity with the culture of the respective country.

3. We have also agreed that fostering cross-border relationships between countries sharing borders would

positively influence intercultural exchanges. For example, cross-border markets between Tajikistan and the Badakhshan province of Afghanistan represent a specific example of a cross-border relationship whose main aim is trading and selling homemade products but ultimately leads to intercultural communication between the two countries. As active participants of these markets, according to our observations, besides trading, people come together and discuss, e.g., changes in the accent of the Shughni language, the mindsets of the people, their own daily lives, and religious developments.

The United Nations has always played a pivotal role in contributing to peace and security worldwide. UNRCCA, having already launched the UNRCCA Preventive Diplomacy Academy, trained us in preventive diplomacy and conflict prevention. It could further however facilitate our contribution to the implementation of the UN Youth,

Peace and Security agenda through an online platform. There, we could continue exchanging ideas, sharing experiences and feedback for further improvements.

The UN as a whole could contribute through resources and methodological support for the implementation of the above-mentioned projects. It could also replicate this experience and lessons learned in similar projects that foster closer contact among the young people of the region. The projects developed and implemented as part of the UNRCCA Preventive Diplomacy Academy are new initiatives to improve regional communication and to help enhance the energy of the young generation. The development and implementation of more projects that will maximize the contribution of young people to strengthen peace, mutual understanding and good neighbourly relations would be a very good example of the implementation of SDG16 and SDG17 and the UN Youth Strategy 2030.



Cross-border Tajik-Afghan market (Tem)

MESSAGE 2: YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING



Young people represent an important part of the world's population. They often engage in informal processes connected to politics, such as participation in civil society. However, they are represented on a lesser scale in national and political bodies, such as parliaments. Further, many young people do not use their right to participate in elections. Taken together, this can impact the quality of democracy in the State.

We believe that we can make a significant contribution to the development of our societies.

In order for us to activate and develop our active civic skills, such as volunteerism, participation in civil society, we need support from the UN and the Governments of our countries.

We strive to urge all young people in our region not to stand aside and to take an active part in the political and social life of our region for peace, security and cooperation.

The projects implemented by us were full of cooperation between countries, and between border regions in particular. For example, an environmental project was implemented between the Bukhara region of Uzbekistan and the Lebap province of Turkmenistan, as well as a project on intercultural communication between the Talas region of Kyrgyzstan and the Jambyl region of Kazakhstan.



Activating the young generation in Central Asia in this way makes us understand that, if given the chance, young people can positively influence processes that contribute to peaceful life for all regions.

In this context, the UNRCCA Preventive Diplomacy Academy project sees young people as a positive social-transformative force and aims to help expand assistance in enhancing the knowledge of young people in the field of preventive diplomacy, conflict prevention and the opportunities of regional cooperation.

MESSAGE 3: A WORLD WITHOUT TERRORISM



Religious extremism in Central Asia is a threat to sustainable development and stability. Extremism in particular poses a great threat to the younger generation.

Today, the efforts of States in strengthening advocacy work, as well as developing programs aimed at protecting the rights of the young generation are very important.

It is very important to strengthen cooperation between the State, social and religious associations, other organizations and civil society as a whole in order to counter extremist activities in the region. To do this, it is necessary to strengthen monitoring of the internet, to eliminate any kind of dissemination of extremist information among the population, including young people. Preventive measures among young people are also very important – their active involvement in the cultural, economic and political life of society.

The education of healthy young people is the key to a healthy society, free from extremist influences.

As volunteers, we can organize information campaigns and youth forums in the regions of Central Asia and Afghanistan to strengthen communication between the younger generations and local authorities.

We, the united youth, must support the initiatives of our countries and of the UN to counteract these negative



ideologies and fight all of its aspects by mobilizing all the resources and opportunities we have.

The UN plays an important role in supporting our countries in the fight against terrorism. Particular attention is paid to measures to prevent violent extremism leading to terrorism, as well as to combat the financing of terrorism. In this difficult struggle, it is necessary to strengthen regional and international cooperation. It is also necessary to promote and implement the UN Sustainable Development Goals, which will contribute to social and economic development in the region and put an end to the threat of terrorism.

MESSAGE 4: WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY



Despite much discussion of the importance of gender equality, the problem persists in Central Asian countries that the genders are not equal in all segments of the population. Women are often excluded from processes connected to negotiations, reconciliation and post-conflict recovery. At the same time, it is women who make up the majority of the internally displaced and refugees.

It is necessary to convey the meaning and significance of gender equality to local authorities.



We can support and promote gender equality, conduct trainings and educate other trainers on this topic.

We have experience in conducting training for 20 girls from border regions. This experience was extremely useful for us as trainers and for the self-realization of girls in the future. And we can also continue this strategy for future events.

The United Nations can work together with the State and those structures that are responsible for implementing national strategies. The UN can also conduct trainings and roundtables on the topic of Women, Peace and Security that will positively affect participants' knowledge and motivation.

MESSAGE 5: WATER AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR REGIONAL COOPERATION



In recent years, by promoting initiatives arising from Water Diplomacy, the Central Asian countries have been able to create national water and glacier management systems, although reforms in this sector are still ongoing. Today, we young people understand that water and glaciers are not only sources of moisture, health and energy, but also sources of political stability in the region. The Central Asian countries perceive water and glaciers as a valuable good and strategic resource. And we believe that the older generation is using its potential joining forces to find ways to solve this problem, because there is no future in the region without water and glaciers.

Today, the State should employ step-by-step strategies to ensure that practical discussions on the theme of the world's ecological welfare turn into customs among the



country's population to be discussed in everyday life. Each country should turn the theme of ecology into a kind of "national code."

On a daily basis, young people should disseminate information on the careful use of the region's water resources among other young people in their workplaces and schools, among their friends and within their families.



The role of the United Nations is to ensure that young people are increasingly involved in the implementation of their special programmes to improve the state of water resources. This can be done by creating opportunities for young people to participate in high-level forums through the platform of the Preventive Diplomacy Academy, which in turn already cooperates with other UN structures on this issue. An example of this is the substantive work of the Regional Centre on water issues in the region.

UNRCCA PREVENTIVE DIPLOMACY ACADEMY

Young people under the age of 29 make up more than 50% of the population in Central Asia. They represent a tremendous resource to support peace and development across the region, but their potential is largely untapped. Often, young people across borders share same problems, fears, hopes and aspirations but a lack of communication and knowledge about one another can fuel suspicion and even animosity.

The United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA) is investing in the next generation in order to support them in expanding their worldview and challenging misperceptions, assumptions and stereotypes. Increased interaction among young people particularly in border areas will help change mind-sets and bring a broader world view and willingness to see people for their character and potential.



Moreover, UNRCCA has recognized that it is impossible to fulfil its preventive diplomacy mandate without engaging with the region's young people. This approach has found wide support from Government officials in Central Asia and Afghanistan, Members of the Security Council and others as well as from across the United Nations system.



Adopting a unique approach, UNRCCA conducted three trainings in 2019 that brought together young people from border regions across Central Asia, namely the Kazakhstan's Jambyl region and Kyrgyzstan's Talas region; Tajikistan's Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast and Afghanistan's Badakhshan province; and Turkmenistan's Lebap province and Uzbekistan's Bukhara region.

Young men and women between the ages of 18 and 29 received practical training in intercultural dialogue and understanding, leadership, conflict resolution and other topics. They also worked together to develop their own local initiatives to put into practice what they had learned.





On 14 December 2019, participants then travelled to Tashkent, Uzbekistan to join UNRCCA's annual Meeting of Deputy Foreign Ministers of Central Asia and Afghanistan. This first-ever Government-Youth Dialogue gave young participants a unique opportunity to make their voices heard by Government officials. Nearly two dozen participants spoke to their Deputy Foreign Ministers and presented to them the messages contained in this brochure.

Prior to the Tashkent event, UNRCCA provided additional training in public speaking, presentation skills and interacting with Government officials so as to enable the young participants to make the most of this opportunity.





The UNRCCA Preventive Diplomacy Academy will continue in 2020 with a new cycle of cross-border workshops, culminating in the second Government-Youth Dialogue in the autumn of 2020.



