

MEET HEELA YOON



Age: 24

Country of Origin: Afghanistan

Country of Residence: The UK

What would the title of your biography be?

Heela would name her biography "Everything Local Peace Builder." She explained that her work is mostly in peace building.

How would you use a time machine?

Heela explained that she "would just go to the twentieth century where there was jazz music and everything was a bit more peaceful or when Afghanistan had a peaceful period like the 40s where things were more peaceful and safer for women."



Speaking at the United Nations Event on the Afghan Peace Process and the importance of youth and women in peacebuilding. Photo Credit: GNWP.

How has your migration experience influenced your work?

According to Heela, it took her a long time to consider herself a refugee because it all happened suddenly and it was this recognition that really influenced her work.



Training in Nangarhar Province on Preventing Violent Extremism and Peacebuilding with 20 youth members.
Photo Credit: AYAP.

What do you hope to accomplish by 2030?

She wants to focus more on expanding her organization - a local NGO - she states that "often grassroots NGOs are totally sidelined from any peace-building initiatives or any work related to humanitarian work." Heela is trying to amplify the concept of supporting grassroots NGOs and local NGOs who are led by young women, and hopefully to work with many international organizations to learn more about the systematic ways to build peace in a more sustainable; in addition to implement sustainable development goals in a way that is not just temporary. Heela wants to encourage people to have strong political wills and she hopes to travel as much as possible.



If you had a superpower what would it be and why?

Heela would choose teletransportation. She feels that she is missing out on so many opportunities like conferences that she wants to attend, but a lot of countries are not providing visas for Afghans and she can't go back to her country right now as she is an asylum seeker. So if she had this power she would not need any of these logistic papers to travel anywhere.



How do you connect with your diaspora community and support it in both countries of origin and residence?

She finds that even though she has not been back to Afghanistan in years, she sees that she is able to contribute and amplify the voices of others through her work and this has further contributed to her work.



One Young World conference on the Role of Youth and the Current Situation in Afghanistan: Photo Credit: One Young World.

Which Sustainable Development Goal is most relevant for your work?

For Heela, SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) are the most relevant. To her "if you don't have a strong institution or peace or a rule of law in a country implementing and sustaining these goals, it will be hard. Also, we should not just be focusing on providing basic education but quality education, especially with the school ban on girls as has happened in Afghanistan"



What would you tell other young people who want to make an impact in their communities of origin and residence?

Heela explains that she thinks one piece of advice would be having a strong team because when she started her own NGO, she was quite young and if people are working on social issues it takes a lot of time, patience, or motivation. In addition, having a strong political will would also contribute to bringing change. Another piece of advice Heela comments on would be to have patience and keep working. She also recommends focusing on a single issue as this is when you can make a change. Finally, she believes that taking care of mental health should be a priority.



Training on Women, Peace and Security and Local Peacebuilding with 30 young women and men in Nangarhar and Laghman provinces: Photo Credit: AYAP.