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# THE WAR WILL END

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The war will end  
And the leaders will warm together  
And there remains that old mother who is  
looking forward to her martyred child  
And that young woman who is waiting for  
her lover  
And the children who are waiting for their  
hero father  
I don't know who sold the homeland  
But I saw who  
He/She paid the price.  
"Mahmood Darwish"

Life is not same for all of us; some people live what they consider a normal life—born and raised in peace, they plan and strive to achieve their goals. But others are defined and driven by outside forces, which determine their direction. For me, a citizen of Afghanistan, almost everything in my life has been directed by outside forces, not by me. As a child of a war-torn country, whose family, friends, acquaintances and everybody in her society for three generations have been victims of war, it is not surprising that I choose to be an activist and call for peace. Wouldn't you? It is the least I can do to help make the world a more beautiful place to live.

I believe that war is a voluntary and stupid choice by political forces for their own profit and power. If we try, we can always find solutions with fewer casualties to solve genuine problems. War always and inevitably results from a failure of human intelligence and imagination, and it inflicts dire and incalculable long-term harm that lasts for generations. Do warmongers really think that war will solve the apparent problems? Recently, this word "war" has been so hateful to me that I can't even be proud, as an Afghan citizen, of winning an unequal war. We call the Afghan-Soviet War an unequal war because Afghanistan was a poor country, while the Soviet Union was a superpower. However, this superpower couldn't win the war after invading my country in 1979. That devastating war is the main cause of my social activism for peace; it made me realize how stupid and evil the decision to invade another country and fight with each other is.

Perhaps if you hear my story of how war shaped my family's lives for three generations, you, too, will understand the importance of peace and social activism. My words may seem exaggerated, but although I was born

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seven years after the end of the Afghan-Soviet war, I declare that I was and am a victim of that war. Although we can find casualty statistics, what I am talking about goes beyond these numbers. The cost of war must be understood not only in terms of deaths, but in terms of children orphaned, women widowed, refugees forced to flee their countries against their will, mentally and physically ill and elderly people and their families, and others subjected to the painful conditions caused by war -- all are "victims of war."

Unfortunately, those of us who are victims of war too often allow our governments and politicians to use us as fuel for their power struggles and as a means to maintain, consolidate, or increase their power. This happened to us Afghans, and we are still suffering from the devastating impacts of the Afghan-Soviet war that ended over thirty years ago. I doubt the stench left over from that war will be cleaned up or erased anytime soon. My bitter personal experience of the effects of the lack of peace led me to understand how important peace is and how urgent it is to call the world toward it.

The Afghan-Soviet war started in 1979. My mother was five that year, and the war made her an immigrant, when she and her family fled the war to Iran, and a half-orphan at seven. My grandmother was widowed by the war at 30, and she had to raise her eight

children, the eldest of whom was nine years old, alone. My mother's father had belonged to a rich family, and they owned hundreds of kilometers of land in our province in Afghanistan. But my mother and her siblings were orphans and weren't able to travel from Iran to Afghanistan or to sell their land. Thus, despite owning property, they grew up in poverty as a direct result of war. When I say poverty, I mean that they did not have enough food to eat. I mean that they had no clothing, so they had to reuse other people's used clothes. My aunt says that most of their classmates in Iran used to ridicule them for their old clothes. All these experiences, which represented the impact of war on human lives, made me more determined to keep the ideal of peace in my mind and heart and to struggle to achieve it.

My grandfather stayed in Afghanistan and fought against the Soviets, but he sent his family to Iran because it wasn't safe for them to stay. I've heard from my mother that the Soviet were inspecting the houses of Mujahidin and arresting any man from their families. They killed one of my grandfather's nephews after arresting him, just as they killed my grandfather in battle. Widowed by the war at a young age, my grandmother never re-married, but the difficult life conditions after the martyrdom of her husband, and the poverty imposed by war and immigration forced her to make painful choices to survive.

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And so, she married my mother -- at the age of 13 -- to her cousin, my 25-year-old father. As I heard from my elders, my grandmother never asked my mother about this marriage. Instead, one day, when my mother talked and laughed with her cousins and my grandmother noticed it, she told her not to laugh aloud, because she was married now. To understand this, we need to understand long-standing customs and traditions of the Afghan people. The groom's family chooses the girl they think is suitable for their child and goes to the girl's parents to propose. If the girl's parents like the groom and his family, they say yes and give a handkerchief, thread, and needle, to the family, as a promise of their daughter's marriage to the boy. But if the groom or the groom's family are not liked by the girl's family, they receive a rejection.

While some families ask the opinion of the bride and groom about this marriage, others decide for their children. My mother was one of those who was not informed. And so, one day, when she was happy with the presence of her aunt and her aunt's daughters in their house and was laughing with them, her mother told her not to laugh loudly because laughing loudly is not appropriate for a married woman. Without telling my mother, my grandmother had promised her marriage to my father and his family.

In later years, when we asked my grandmother why she hadn't asked her own daughter's opinion, she said, "I knew she would not be satisfied with this marriage, and I, in desperate need of help, could not find any other way." My grandmother still suffers from the wrong decision she made thirty years ago and expresses her shame and regret to us. So, to me, this is another cost of war: my grandmother did this to her daughter because she wasn't able to support her children and believed that her son-in-law would help her. Perhaps because of this involuntary marriage at age 13, my mother encouraged and supported the education of me and my sisters, and before that she fostered the education of her siblings, who had been deprived of education due to the family's poverty and refugee status. Due, in fact, to war. Knowing the story of my grandmother and my mother, I feel a huge responsibility toward all the women whose lives have been reduced to only "breathing" as a result of the lack of peace.

My father, who was born in 1963, was also a victim of war. He was 16 when the Soviets invaded our country. At a young age, he witnessed the tragic martyrdom of his three uncles, as well as other close relatives, a cousin, a brother, and dozens of his peers. My father would sometimes talk to us about his many bitter memories of the war. While he was no more than a teenager, he was forced - many times -- to collect the pieces of the

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corpses of his comrades from the ground, while all the internal parts of their bodies were visible and scattered. As he spoke of these memories, I could see and feel the change on his face. How sad he looked when he talked about the pains and hardships of the war, and how proud he looked when he talked about the bravery of the great men who sacrificed their lives for the freedom of the country.

As a result of war, trauma, and injuries, my father suffered for much of his life from anger, depression, and PTSD, and he eventually became addicted to drugs. These further consequences of war caused my mother, my sisters, and me to suffer for our lifetimes. And so, this Soviet-Afghan war made our family refugees and immigrants, deprived us of the blessing of literacy and education, inflicted trauma, mental illness, and addiction, and made us and many Afghans helpless and hopeless. Thus, I believe that the first spark for me to call for peace happened years before I was born, in the miseries that war brought upon my parents' lives. Hatred of war created a love for peace in me. My nature has been mixed with pacifism; and thus, I have been a social activist for peace.

So many costs of war, visible to me every day, bring me to think more and more about the urgent need for peace. In Afghanistan, we lost many great men in the Soviet invasion, and the generation that survived the war

were often orphans left with a bag full of regrets and daily repetition of "I wish it wasn't like this..." and "I wish it was like this..." While we believe we know what war does to soldiers and families and economies, we too often forget the invisible costs of war: it can also deprive us of exactly the strong and courageous people who might have helped build a peaceful society. I understand, looking back now, that we suffered both the deaths of those leaders who might have rebuilt the country, and the loss of those who fled the country, and the contributions they all might have made.

Even measurable war casualties are always far greater than the statistics show. I have seen so many children, mothers, siblings, and fathers of martyrs that I doubt the credibility of the published statistics on the number of people killed in this war. My grandfather, his two brothers, and many of his friends and comrades were victims of the Soviet-Afghan war, as well as my grandfather and grandmother and mother and father and my aunts and uncles. Their generations are still burning in the same fire that originated from the war. We lost hundreds and thousands of great people in the war. Our homes became "fatherless" and our country "leaderless," lacking leaders who are charismatic and wise, not any selfish people who are thirsty for power.

In short, my life and the lives of my family have taught me that war has never had a good and sweet outcome and never will. War has always been painful, destructive, and terrifying for all sides. Russia's war in Afghanistan was not only devastating for us, but also caused the death and injury of thousands of Russian soldiers, the suffering of hundreds and thousands of Russian families, and the destruction of millions of dollars of the nation's resources. But still, unfortunately, throughout history, human beings have repeatedly caught themselves and their fellow humans in this fire of wars.

As a victim of the Afghan-Soviet war, I deeply understand that the effects of war cannot be summed up in the published statistics of war casualties. Is war the solution to the conflicts or the creator of more conflicts? It reminds me of a famous quote often attributed to Albert Einstein: "Two things are infinite: the universe and human stupidity; and I'm not sure about the universe." I think only a fool can sacrifice tens, hundreds, and thousands of other people in this short human life because of his/her greed and selfishness.

I ask the peace-loving people of the world not to be silent, but to work for the end of all current and future wars. Our silence in the face of this horror causes us to burn endlessly in the fire of war. Let's join hands and rid our minds and hearts – and those of our children -- of the dirty culture of war and killing. Let's

welcome into our countries the refugees of these wars, understanding that eventually, the fire which burns you today will engulf me tomorrow. Let's spend the same energy, time, and money that we sacrifice in wars for power, on safety and prosperity of ourselves and our world. Let's build schools and hospitals, and spend money finding solutions to climate change or eliminating poverty. Let's each of us, wherever we are, try to make the world a more beautiful place for humanity.

My war now is the war of the pen; I fight with my pen for cosmopolitanism. I request to all the peace-loving people of the world that each one of them, with their actions, words, or even with a text like me, try to realize this indisputable human right, which is to live in peace.

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