

**Remarks by Ms Sofia Ramyar**  
**Security Council Briefing on Youth, Peace and Security**  
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*(As prepared for delivery)*

Many people dream of seeing helicopters or riding in one.

I pray to God I never see one again. They remind me of the tragic moment in my life during the civil war when a helicopter dropped a bomb on our home in Kabul and destroyed its floors in 1995.

Traumatized and scared, my siblings and I found each other safe in the yard after the dust settled and we started look for other member of our family.

Bismillah-e Rahman-e Rahim

Mr. Chair, members of the UN Security Council, and distinguished participants. Good afternoon!

Thank you, Excellency Ambassador Gustavo Meza-Cuadra, for your kind invitation to present before you and the UN Security Council members.

It is such an honor to be here – it is a dream that has come true!

Please allow me to outline my speech today: I will share why I have a passion for peace, introduce a large youth-led organization that I lead, talk about how the UN Security Council Resolutions 2250 and 2419 support my work, and what it is like to be a leader in Afghanistan as a young woman. I will conclude my speech with a few modest recommendations to the UN.

Mr. Chair,

My passion for peace traces back to the tragic experience I just narrated. War forced my family to flee to Pakistan and live in refugee camps, without papers, and away from our homeland when I was four years old.

This war continues until today – and my story is being recreated every single day in people's lives.

Life in refugee camps stirred a desire in me to work for peaceful co-existence in Afghanistan where all citizens benefit from their basic human rights to access to quality education and contribute positively to the society. I could not wait to return to Kabul, rebuild our home, and enroll at a local school and prepare myself to pursue my vision.

The creation of a democratic government in 2001 allowed me to come back to Afghanistan and work through the challenges of the war for a peaceful country. I joined Afghans for Progressive Thinking (APT), which is founded by an Afghan youth on the belief that youth are not just victims or perpetrators of violence but youth are active contributors to

peace processes. I joined the organization in 2012 and become the Executive Director in 2014.

In a male-dominated Afghan society, my leadership has not been accepted and respected by most men. This experience has also stirred a passion in me to also seek theories and practices to challenge the existing prejudice among people towards women's leadership. The result of our work is that now more women are taking leadership positions, and are being supported by men at the same time.

Mr. Chair,

Youth form the majority of the Afghan population, and they are strategically placed in the society to create change at their communities and push for structural changes at the policy level particularly at this important juncture of our history, now that we are closer to a peace agreement than ever before.

I want to assure you that the Youth, Peace, and Security agenda is preparing a generation of young women and men in Afghanistan that will lead our country towards peace, development, and prosperity.

The organization I lead, Afghans for Progressive Thinking, is one concrete example of an entity that has been encouraged by the UN policy stances to work for peace in Afghanistan. Being a woman who works to create peace in Afghanistan has never been easy but the motivation I have received from our partners particularly the UN's partnership with our umbrella organization, the United Network of Young Peacebuilding (UNOY) and the Civil Society Platform for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (CSPPS), have given me the energy to pursue my visions with confidence.

Afghan young women and men have the potential to lead our country, and create not just a peaceful Afghanistan but also a stable region in which our country's unique geographical location serves as a bridge for ideas, ambitions, and cooperation. With this belief and vision, we work with youth to equip them for their leadership roles in government, civil society, and the private sector. Since APT's inception in 2011, over 20,000 youth and university students have taken part in our activities and most of them come from the rural areas in Afghanistan.

As a leading organization in the implementation of the resolution 2250, we held many debates and dialogues that support the implementation of resolution 2250 in Afghanistan and have worked with the government of Afghanistan on a practical action plan for Youth, Peace, and Security.

I would like to take the opportunity to recognize and appreciate the positive efforts of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to include young people in decision making processes including efforts to allow them to assume leadership positions. Ambassador Adela Raz who is a young Afghan woman serving as Afghanistan's Permanent Representative to the UN is a testament to how far Afghans have come along.

Nonetheless, an idea of exclusion, hierarchical relationships between men and women, and elders and youth, still dominate the societal, cultural, political and economic landscape across the Afghan society. This needs to change.

Mr. Chair,

I am pleased to thank the Security Council on behalf of APT and Afghan youth for adopting resolution 2250. My colleagues and I had the honor to partner with the United Network of Young Peacebuilders on behalf of Afghan youth and advocate for the resolution until it was adopted in 2015.

Subsequent to our activities to implement the resolution, APT, along with the government of the Netherlands and with the support from the Afghan government, pioneered an initiative to select the first ever-Afghan Youth Representative to the United Nations last year. This year, we are working closely with the Embassy of Germany in Kabul to select the second Afghan Youth Representative whom you will meet later in the year.

Mr. Chair,

Let me conclude by stressing the following points:

1. The UN needs to take a long-term approach and design policies that make youth an integral part of decision-making processes. During the last few years, inclusion of youth in government has been encouraging but it has not been sustainable.
2. Youth must be allowed to play a key role in the peace process in Afghanistan – from the negotiation stage to the implementation. As youth represent over 60% of our population, we have the highest stake in the peace process.
3. Youth must be seen as equal partners; not project implementers or grantees.
4. The Office of the UN Secretary General's Envoy for Youth is uniquely positioned to encourage National Coalitions and Strategies on UNSCR 2250, and evaluate the effectiveness of their implementation. Well established local youth organizations will be ideal partners for this activity.

Mr. Chair,

I wish to assure you once again that young Afghans whom you have met in settings like this one today are a testament to a new Afghanistan – a country that exports a message of peace and friendship, a partner to the global community.

We desire to move forward, not backward. We thank you for partnering with our people and particularly with youth in our vision to create an inclusive and peaceful Afghanistan.

Thank you!