

Dr. Sakena Yacoobi -2017 Sunhak Peace Prize Laureate

“...share love, compassion and wisdom for an indestructible base for living in peace and harmony...”

It is a great honor to be chosen as a 2017 Sunhak Peace Prize Laureate. This year the Sunhak Peace Prize focuses its attention on the global refugee crisis. It is a privilege to be recognized along with Dr. Gino Strada as someone who has contributed to helping refugees and helping in their resettlement.

I, myself, became a refugee in 1979 after the invasion of my country. My family all became refugees. I know what it feels like to be in a place where all of your rights have been taken away from you. I know how it feels to lose everything you have, including your dignity and self-confidence. That is why I founded the Afghan Institute of Learning (AIL), and that is why I have chosen to work with Afghan refugees and the resettlement of Afghan refugees and IDPs in Afghanistan for the last 24 years. I wanted to find a way to help Afghans rebuild their self-respect and self-confidence; I wanted them to be able to trust again, rebuild their communities and reestablish their core values; I wanted them to be able to live in peace and harmony and have a sustainable way of life.

When I first went to the refugee camps in Pakistan, I saw courage in the women, men and children, but I also saw despair and hopelessness. I knew that I wanted to do something to transform the minds and spirits of my people. I knew that to build trust, I needed to listen to them; I needed to include them and their ideas in programs that they wanted, and I needed to ask each community to contribute something to their projects. Their contributions would give them self-worth and dignity. In other words, I wanted them to become partners with us. And, because education has changed my life, I decided that the solution to transforming the lives of my people lay in offering them holistic education—education that would empower them, give them health, critical thinking skills, and skills to earn a living so that they could be self-sufficient—education that would help them to be creative and have vision—education that gave them wisdom but also taught them about love and compassion. Most importantly, because I am a spiritual person and I believe that God created all of us as equal human beings, I made up my mind to include universal core values that bring peace and harmony for all in any work that I decided to do with my people.

When you share love, compassion and wisdom, you provide humanity with an indestructible base for living in peace and harmony that no one can take away. You create an environment where everyone respects each other’s rights and appreciates different cultures, traditions, religions and ideas. With love, compassion and wisdom as your base, then everyone globally can live in harmony and peace.

Globally, if all are educated and have equal opportunity for a holistic educational system, you can overcome poverty and disease. Then, there is no war. We live in an era of conflict, mass displacement, growing hatred and great distrust. We need to look at the situation deeply and remember that we are all humans created equally by God. We must share and collaborate with each other to make this world a better place for everyone.