

Peace Prize Nomination

Organisation's Name: Aware Girls
Organisation Location: Peshawar, Pakistan
Organisation's Website: <http://www.awaregirls.org>

Description of specific project, practice, or technique

Program: Youth Peace Network

The project aims to counter militancy and violent extremism, prevent young people from joining terrorist/militant groups, promote reconciliation in the communities, to combat religious extremism and promote an alternative pluralistic discourse based on the values of tolerance, non-violence, peaceful co-existence. The working areas of the Project are Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, Baluchistan, FATA (Federally Administered Tribal Areas), Malakand Division and Afghanistan.

A network of young peace-builders in the name of "Youth Peace Network" has been established in four districts of the Province and FATA engaging 350 youth directly as Peace Activists, their capacity as Peace Activist has been strengthened through training on "Skills for Peace-building, Conflict Resolution and combating extremism", these peace activists are reaching more than 1000 youth annually through peer education, peace dialogues, community exchanges, and conflict resolution thus promoting a culture of harmony, co-existence and non-violence.

Information on organisation or agency including history and scope of its work:

Aware Girls was established in 2002 by group of young women and girls led by Gulalai Ismail at the age of 16, to provide a leadership platform to young women enabling them to act as agents of change, empowerment, and peace.

History of the Organization:

- Aware Girls was initiated in 2002, by a group of young girls who met at a seminar on "Honor Killing" in Peshawar.
- Aware Girls was established as a platform for young women who want to empower women, and work towards gender equality
- Aware Girls is young women led Organization working for women empowerment, gender equality, and peace in Pakistan. We are working to strengthen the leadership capacity of young women enabling them to act as agents of social change and women empowerment in their communities.

Vision:

To create an environment where women and young people can live with Peace, dignity, equity and feel themselves empowered, through bringing changes in the Society

Mission

To promote youth activism under leadership of young women for creating conducive working environment where young people and especially young women can live with Peace, dignity, equity and Justice, enjoying the opportunities to use their all capacities and capabilities for playing role in development and bringing positive changes in the society and lives of the people and ensuring access of young women to enjoy their full human rights having access to Social Services, Financial resources and Decision making.

Objectives of the Organization:

- o To Promote and protect young women's rights, Gender Equality, Equity, Justice and Good Governance through advocacy and Capacity building of young women to have equal access to Decision making, Social Services, Recreation, and Financial Resources
- o To promote peace, Non violence, tolerance and pluralism through active and meaningful participation of young people and especially young women in Peace building process by strengthening their capacities in building Peace and creating Harmony in the Society.
- o To promote Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights of Young Women and to strengthen the capacity of Community Based Organizations in Sexual and Reproductive Health.

Thematic Areas of Aware Girls:

1. Promoting Peace, Non-Violence and Pluralism
2. Young Women Leadership for Human Rights
3. Addressing Gender base violence
4. Political and Economic Empowerment of Young Women
5. Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights of Women

Strategies:

1. Capacity building and group formation of young women
2. Campaigning and Policy Advocacy
3. Peer Education
4. Community Dialogues and Behavior Change Transformation
5. Helpline and Referral Services

Describe the context in which the organisation works, analyse the conflict, and indicate how this analysis has influenced the peacebuilding work of the organisation:

For more than a decade, now Pakistan has been at the forefront of the US led War on Terror. A conflict has claimed closed to 50,000 Pakistani lives. Within Pakistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province has consistently been bearing a relatively higher proportion of these losses. According to the South Asian Terrorism Portal (SATP), of the 652 bomb blasts in Pakistan during 2012, 34% were in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In 2007, most terrorist groups in Pakistan came together to form the Tehreek e Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Since its inception, the TTP has been responsible for some of the most gruesome terrorist attacks within Pakistan. While the Taliban have mostly been based out of the Federally Administrated Tribal Agencies (FATA), but in July 2007, a group by the name of Tehreek I Nifaz-e-shariat-e-Mohammadi (TNSM) took over large area of Swat district of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. Although TNSM's influence was concentrated in the Malakand division; a division that includes the districts of Swat, Buner, Shangla, Dir Upper, Dir Lower & Chitral, it was the strongest in Swat valley. During the run-up to TNSM's takeover of Swat, it had unleashed a campaign of terror that involved physical as well as psychological techniques. For the later, it deployed FM radio technology, and such was its impact that its leader, Mullah Fazlullah became popularly known as Mullah Radio. The TNSM merged into the TTP during 2007. TTP strived for enforcing its own strict interpretation of Islam in areas under its control. It especially emphasized upon limiting the freedom of women, by banning female education and banning female mobility. Malala Yousafzai's initial blog for the BBC under her pen name "Gul Makai" was in response to these restrictions.

Furthermore, they banned polio vaccination, music and established their own Sharia courts to dole out strict punishments to enforce their dictates. Any discourse that did not compliment their own was dealt with, in the harshest of manners.

Militancy and extremism has thrived in this region due to prevalent extremist, non-tolerant and violent values, poor governance and a concomitant lack of economic, political, and human development opportunities. The Islamic Militant Groups/Taliban have been able to take advantage of the peoples' strong affection to their religion and mobilize young people to join their ranks under the pretext of defending Islam. Militant groups use the young recruits to promote their agenda through acts of terror such as suicide bombing, torching schools, public institutes, and by slaughtering innocent civilians. The level of tolerance has been significantly reduced among young people, leading to the spread of violence all over the country in a variety of shape and forms.

According to the Report "Connecting the Dots: Education and Religious Discrimination in Pakistan" released by the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), schools in Pakistan often serve as incubators of societal intolerance, especially toward religious minorities, with profoundly negative implications for religious freedom and security. Through the propaganda of militant organizations, religious political parties, and text books an insecurity around the Islamic identity has been developed, the Islamic identity has been portrayed

equivalent to Pakistani identity and that defense of Pakistan is equivalent to the defense of Islam. This skewed understanding has influenced youth to view existence of religious minorities as threatening to Islam and the propagation of Islamic identity as their responsibility.

The factors which destroy the peace of Pakistan, which make Pakistan a less tolerant society and which make youth prone and vulnerable to fall prey to the militants groups can be summarized as:

- Propagation of intolerance through curriculum of schools
- Systematic eradication of cultural activities, fun, and arts from the province
- Disconnecting youth from their history and rich cultural heritage, isolating youth, and then manipulating them through education, propaganda, and media and causing security threats to the artists and musicians
- Lack of Good Governance
- Lack of Economic Insecurities
- Penetration of the Underlying Ideology of Taliban in the society
- Glorification of political violence in the name of Jihad
- Propaganda of militant groups and religious political parties against minorities
- Indoctrination of youth systematically for the love of weapons instead of education, books, poetry, and music
- Young People are exposed to an environment, which promotes discrimination and violence against religious minorities, or anyone who is a threat to the perceived Islamic identity. The increasingly permissive legal environment where violence spreads and violent groups proliferate without the threat of punishment compounded by the weak structures of governance has further contributed to the spread of violence and militant groups.

One of dynamics of the religious extremism in Pakistan is lack of tolerance and imposition of the extreme ideology through violence, fear, and destruction. Throughout the last decades the narratives has been changed, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province once known for its secular politics, now has become the hub of religious extremism and militancy. Radicalized education, media, and non-secular politics have played a vital role in indoctrination of the youth and prevalence of religious extremism. The society is at threat of further destabilization by the emerging intercommunity, intertribal, sectarian and ethnic conflicts, and continuous radicalization.

Because of the prevalence of religious extremism in the society, and exposure to education, media, and politics which promote radicalization, the young people are more at risk of being recruited by the militant and extremist organizations.

In this situation Aware Girls work to combat growing Religious extremism and Terrorism among young People through capacity building of young activists to play their role as agents of change for Peace in their communities in the conflict zone of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province of Pakistan; and promote an alternative pluralistic discourse based on the values of tolerance, non-violence, peace and mediation plus dialogue as conflict resolution young people of conflict zone in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province of Pakistan, through capacity building, corner meetings and peace education sessions among young people.

Impact of the organisation or agency's work, including credible policy and advocacy influence that contributes toward peace:

Youth Peace Network has been successfully running for 5 years and has trained 320 young people in 12 groups on the issue of religious militancy, peacebuilding, conflict resolution, and leadership skills enabling them to promote non-violence and durable peace in their communities. 5000 people vulnerable to violent groups are reached every year.

Values of tolerance, non-violence, peace, and mediation plus dialogue as conflict resolution tool have been promoted among young people thus preventing them from violence and joining ranks of terrorists/militant groups. The trained young people have de-radicalized young people vulnerable to extremist groups, and have combated religious extremism by promoting the values

of peace, non-violence, tolerance, mediation and dialogue among their young fellows and have prevented them from joining movements which foster their agenda and impose their own values on others by violence. It prevented young people from becoming victim of the politics of radicalization, and created awareness and sense of playing their role as Responsible Citizens.

The trained activists practice mediation and dialogue for resolving community conflicts, these practices have become role model cases for communities which have been resolved through mediation and dialogue instead of revenge.

Mediation and dialogue led to social reconciliation, reduced the threats which destabilize the communities such as inter-group conflicts, intra-tribal conflicts, ethnic, and sectarian conflicts, Promotion of mediation and dialogue as a tool also reduced the threats to human rights violations in the communities, and reduced the long term conflicts in these communities, thus reducing the fragility of the state, and moving one step ahead towards stability.

Tell us a story about this organisation or agency's peace work:

YOUTH PEACE NETWORK MEMBER SOBIA ALI

Sobia knew two street boys, cousins, Arshad (13) and Amjad (15) who came to her home to collect rubbish. While talking to Sobia about their life goals they said they want to become soldiers of Islam. Sobia discovered that the boys felt it was acceptable to kill non-Muslims because they all are enemies of Islam. The boys had learnt this at their workplace from other young people.

Sobia decided to start a study circle with them, where she first clarified that not all non-Muslims are enemies. To do this she showed them pictures of non-Muslims who were working the flood and conflict affected people of Pakistan, which surprised the boys.

When Sobia started talking to them about wars and the impact on communities, the boys were very confused as to why Jihad was allowed if it destroys lives. Sobia then talked to them about how religious sentiments of youth are misused by larger organization to achieve their aims, and how they get power through using young people.

She then discussed the different ways conflicts can be resolved and that violence and war are not appropriate tools to resolve conflicts, using different examples from their daily lives. The boys were happy to learn that they did not need to fight when they can talk to resolve issues and had learnt about dialogue and negotiation skills and how they can promote their cause through active non-violence. At the end of third month, Sobia asked these boys about what their life goal is, and the boys said that their goal is to work for clean environment and a peaceful Pakistan.

2nd Story of Change:

Jan Sher Khan; One of the Peace Activist of Aware Girls (Jan Sher is a fake name, as the actual person did not allow us to use his identity for security reasons, the story is in his own words)

Imran is younger in all his siblings and is studying in class 5th, he has four brothers and three sisters, after loss of two years education he got admission in grade 7 and he is so happy. He had uncle who was involved with the militants groups and became suicide bomber and lost his life, Imran was idealizing his uncle from his bravery,. He was sent to the militants camps through different stake holders, present in the community and they target youth because they do not have vision and they can be mold to any provoking thoughts easily. They are radicalized by the propaganda based videos and literature.

Imran spend two weeks there and he returned to home to meet his family before he finally departs for the Jihad/joining militant group. I tried to meet him ,at first he got angry and asked me that he do not want to talk to me because I'm foreign agent, but I keep on my struggle and after 4 meeting with him he got agree on listening to me.

I asked him that how did he, came in contact with those people, he said that he were used to watch different violent videos available in the market, it was so appealing and I used it imagine

myself instead of them.

I told him that what he has seen in videos and what he read in their literature is all fib, and propaganda. Islam is the religion of Peace, harmony and respect of all, I also added examples from "Meesa-q-e-Madina pact" where the Prophet Muhammad himself signed peace agreements, after engaging him in discussion for around one month on the importance of non-violence he understood my point of view and later he asked me to get him admission in school, because he decided that he will become a responsible human being and will serve the humanity, now he is in class 7Th and he is living his happy and peaceful life.

These young people are trapped by the militants, in the days of summer vacation, when they are free from other academic activities so different militant's channels and stake holders present in the community keep them under their observation and keep an eye on their every activity. So they invite them to different places for small talks and later they start their main purpose.

Aware Girls through 12 groups of peace activists reach more than 5000 young people every year preventing them from joining militant organizations, and promoting non-violence among them for durable peace.