

AFGHAN LINKS

ISSUE – 19 – 21st May 2005 (TOTAL NO. 28)

Afghan Links is a free newsletter for readers who have a keen interest in Afghanistan, its history, people and culture. It invites news and articles from anyone who wishes to create and maintain constructive links between Afghanistan and other countries by sharing their expertise, information and ideas in any field.

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JOB VACANCIES

- **Amnesty International Require a Research and Campaign Assistant (Afghanistan)**

You have the vision. Share it.

Research and Campaign Assistant (Afghanistan)

£20,778 pro-rata

Based: London

Permanent, part-time

You will contribute to the fulfilment of the team's mission by developing and maintaining effective information and administrative systems and procedures. You will also assist in the gathering and processing of information relevant to the team's research and campaigning work for the promotion and protection of human rights.

You will need to be able to demonstrate your ability to work as a part of a team, manage difficult deadlines, prioritise and multi-task your work. Knowledge of Afghanistan is desirable. A working knowledge of Dari/Pashto is desirable.

For further information about this and our other current vacancies and to apply online, **please visit us at www.amnesty.org/jobs** fax us on 020 7413 5822 or send an A4 SAE (42p) to The Recruitment Team, HR Program, 1 Easton Street, London WC1X 0DW. CVs will not be accepted.

- **Please quote Ref: ASA/05/04**
- **Closing date: 25 May 2005**
- **Interviews to be held on: 28 and 29 June 2005**

The International Secretariat of Amnesty International actively promotes cultural diversity and equal opportunities. [home](#)

- **DACAAR - Danish Committee for Aid To Afghan Refugees Require a Chief of Programmes, Afghanistan**

DACAAR invites applications for the above position for our development programme in Afghanistan.

Duties: The Chief of Programmes reports to the director and is responsible for guiding the strategic direction of DACAAR programmes as agreed. This includes ensuring coherence and synergy between the two main programmes, water and sanitation and rural development. Together with the director and the two programme managers, the chief of programmes will fund raise and prepare necessary proposals and reports to donors and government; lead advocacy processes and be responsible for ensuring that quality monitoring and evaluation takes place. The chief of programmes will lead a process of gradual transfer of activities to Afghan institutions and private sector. Finally, the chief of programmes will monitor contract management of the two programmes in terms of impact, outputs, indicators and expenditure.

Qualifications: At least ten years of experience with community-based, rural development programmes. Skills and experience in advocacy particularly influencing government policy makers; experience in strategy development and in monitoring, evaluation and research. Work experience from and knowledge about Islamic culture in general and Afghanistan in particular is an advantage.

Duty station: Kabul, Afghanistan. The work will require some travelling in rural areas in Afghanistan. For the time being, Kabul is classified as a non-family duty station.

Contract: 1 year, with possibilities for extension, with the Danish Refugee Council (on behalf of DACAAR).

Availability: 1 July 2005.

Application: In English before 20 May 2005

A detailed job description and a copy of DACAAR's 2003 Annual Report can be viewed at www.dacaar.org or <http://www.dacaar.org/dacaar.asp?id=118> [home](#)

JOINT ELECTION MANAGEMENT BODY (JEMB)

Female teacher in Parwan Province Submits Candidacy for Afghan Parliament May 10th 2005

A 37 year old teacher and mother of five from Parwan province, near the capital Kabul, is one of a small, but growing number of women registering as a candidate for the Wolsej Jirga (Lower House of the National Assembly) elections on September 18 2005.

Her decision to run for office was taken with the full support and encouragement of her husband and family. She states the importance she attaches to having the chance to represent the people of Parwan:

“For years we have wanted effective politics and a strong government. Under the Taliban, I never thought the day would come when we could have our say. We feared for our lives, we were under stress. They were hard circumstances and through it we gained strength,” she said after submitting her nomination papers.

“Mentally I was sleeping during that time. But I never gave up hope that we would get outside help. They were five long years.”

Keeping mentally alert during the Taliban regime was achieved by continuing to teach young boys and girls behind closed doors and by founding an independent radio station reaching out to support the women of Parwan.

A graduate of Kabul High School and Faizabad University, she was partly inspired to move into politics by her late father.

“He was a scholar and a bridge between the people and the government. I feel I can fulfill a similar role by being involved in the lives of people as their voice in government.”

Still choosing to wear the burqa to go to the bazaar and walk outside her home, she explains that she is forward thinking:

“I am a fully inclusive and active member of my community. They still expect the burka to be worn and I respect that. Wearing a burka does not exclude women from contributing to a progressive society.”

Female candidate nominations for both the Wolsej Jirga and Provisional Council have been received throughout the country. Many more candidate information kits are being given out daily. Irene Maria Eich, Provincial Election Officer for the Parwan Province explains:

“Every day we are receiving female visitors enquiring about candidacy. This is very encouraging and shows both spirit and determination. The election process is for the whole electorate, and we are very pleased the women in the community recognise this. It is, after all, their election also”.

In the Wolesi Jirga a total of 68 seats, 2 for each province, have been set aside for women. The candidate nomination period runs until 19 May and the JEMB encourages all women to come forward to nominate themselves for WJ and PC elections on 18 September.

For further information please contact:

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bronwync@unops.org.af

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MEDIA

Journalism Freedom Report v.5 - Media Watch



Increasingly strident calls for a clampdown on behavior and practices that are being described as either “un-Islamic”, “against Afghanistan’s culture and traditions” or simply “immoral”, are providing increasing space for a renewed attack on independent media. This month saw the tussle between hardliners and audio-visual media intensifying with the Ulema Council reiterating its earlier call for a crackdown on independent audio-visual media on the grounds that it was un-Islamic.

Anonymous threats to media on grounds of ‘immoral programming’ were in evidence as well with a radio station being castigated for its musical programs. Interestingly, this radio station had also recently aired an expose on land grabbing activities in the area, leading journalists to believe that the charge of ‘immoral’ programming was merely providing a handy stick to those unable to counter the investigative reports.

Without any specific criticism or charge, media organizations are left shadow boxing with specters. Though no ‘action’ such as closure, has been taken against any media organization on grounds/accusations of un-Islamic content, the constant barrage of criticism leaves the independent media using its energies, resources as well as limited leverage to counter the charges rather than concentrate on producing more content. “We have not changed our stand but the pressure we face has made us modify our content from time to time,” a manager in a media organization said.

The technical requirements of electronic media are another reason forcing organizations to tread warily. Media organizations are well aware that while standing on their right to editorial freedom they can be denied requisite facilities and permissions on technical or bureaucratic grounds, especially since the practice often seems to be to ban first and ask later.

Even before the role and powers of the media monitoring commission set up to look at the content of the audio visual media could be clarified, the government set up yet another commission to monitor radio and television broadcasting.

Even political patronage appears to be insufficient protection at times for an increasingly critical media as AINA TV found when one of its reporters was beaten up recently despite the TV channel’s proximity to Northern warlord Abdul Rasheed Dostum.

In another development, the Taliban re-launched its Radio Sharia from a mobile radio station near Kandahar. The Taliban had banned independent media and all electronic media during their regime, broadcasting only on their own radio station Radio Sharia

Nascent efforts to redraft the media law began in late April, apparently initiated by the Ministry of Information and Culture.

JOURNALISM AWARD PROMOTES TOLERANCE, HUMAN RIGHTS

South Asian journalists whose work has helped oppose racism and discrimination are eligible for an annual prize.

May 31 is the deadline to submit materials for the Journalism for Tolerance Prize, organized by the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ). The goal is to promote a deeper understanding of the importance of tolerance, especially when it comes to minorities and differences of culture, ethnicity and religion.

This year the prize is open only to journalists in the South Asian countries of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Entries may be in English, Bengali, Hindi, Nepali, Sinhala, Tamil or Urdu.

The competition is open to all kinds of media, including print, online, TV, radio and photography. The works should have been published or broadcast in 2004.

For more details, including rules and entry forms, visit http://www.ifj-asia.org/page/ifj_prizes.html or contact Laxmi Murthy at ifjsouthasia@hotmail.com.

For any queries or information please contact: Aunohita Mojumdar, Media Analyst, Internews, Haji Mir Ahmad, Baharistan, Karti-Parwan, Kabul aunohita.mojumdar@internews.org or afghanmedia@internews.org or Jawid Ahmed, Media Researcher, +93 79340831.

Please see attachment 3.18 for the full Journalism Report – reproduced with permission from Internews www.internews.org [home](#)

NGOs

Useful Resources for NGOs

Guide for Designing Results-Oriented Projects and Writing Successful Proposals

<http://topics.developmentgateway.org/ngo/rc/ItemDetail.do~itemId=1035129?intcmp=921>

How to Build a Small NGO

<http://topics.developmentgateway.org/ngo/rc/ItemDetail.do~itemId=1034123?intcmp=921>

NGO Manager Organizational Assessment Tool

<http://topics.developmentgateway.org/ngo/rc/ItemDetail.do~itemId=1033762?intcmp=921>

NGO Fundraising Strategies

<http://topics.developmentgateway.org/ngo/rc/ItemDetail.do~itemId=1026573?intcmp=921>

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SECURITY

- **UNAMA Security Advisory 09 May 2005**

STAFF MEMBERS ARE REMINDED OF THE REQUIREMENT TO CARRY AND MONITOR THEIR RADIOS, Channel 11 AT ALL TIMES TO RECEIVE TIMELY UPDATES AND CURRENT SECURITY ADVISORIES MOVEMENT.

2 (two) vehicle movement within the City for all International staff, at all times, except as indicated below.

EXCEPTION:

During Peak Hours, only 1 vehicle is required.

Peak Hours are:

06:30 to 08:30

16:00 to 18:00

No foot movement within the city, staff not to walk in the streets. All bazaars and public locations are off limits until further notice.

Alternate travel routes and timings within the City "Avoid Routine" plan all travel on the main roads, stay away from secondary roads.

COMMUNICATION

Agency Radio/Staff Tracking; all international staff are required to report into Golf Base or Golf Sierra Delta Radio rooms while traveling within the City; example: staff departure from Office and at arrival to their guesthouse.

Nightly radio checks are still mandatory by all staff members of UNAMA.

RESTAURANTS

ALL Kabul City Restaurants have been temporarily removed from the Approved/Cleared Restaurant list.

STAFF MEMBERS ARE REMINDED OF THE REQUIREMENT TO CARRY AND MONITOR THEIR RADIOS, Channel 11 AT ALL TIMES TO RECEIVE TIMELY UPDATES AND CURRENT SECURITY ADVISORIES

Any questions regarding this security advisory or any other security related matters for UNAMA are to be directed to Dwane Connors, UNAMA FSA, or Kent Harrington, UNAMA Security Operations Officer.

Source: Kent Harrington, Security Operations Officer, UNAMA-Kabul. Office: +39 0831 24 6034 Mobile: 070 302 501 E-mail: harrington@un.org Call Sign: G51 [home](#)

- **Research Project on Potential Security-related Uses of Space-based Communications Systems**

Message from Peter Marsden – British and Irish Agencies Afghanistan Group (BAAG)

I have been asked to give a brief presentation to a workshop to be held on 3rd June in connection with a research project supported by the EC to look at the potential security-related uses of space-based communications systems. They have asked me to provide some indication of the use that NGOs make of satellite and other space-based communications systems, whether provided commercially or through UN/military. I attach a questionnaire which gives an indication of what they are looking for. Any information that you can provide to help me give a reasonably informed presentation would be welcome. It may also help in the development of policy.

Many thanks, Peter Marsden.

Please see attachment 2.18 for the questionnaire. This can be returned to Jeanne at Afghanlinks@aol.com or Laura.Jenks@RefugeeCouncil.org.uk [home](#)

- **Afghan riots bode ill for US long-term plans**



An Afghan policeman takes cover as protestors throw stones in Logar province, May 12, 2005. Four policemen and national army soldiers were killed in a clash with protesters in Ghazni province, to the southwest of the capital, residents there said. (photo Ahmad Masood/Reuters)

Riots and protests that have spread from Jalalabad to the Afghan capital in the wake of a report that US interrogators had desecrated the Koran have taken a political turn, with students demanding the government reject US intentions to create a permanent military presence there.

The biggest anti-US protests since the fall of the Taliban are spreading in Afghanistan, kindled by an unconfirmed report that US interrogators at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, desecrated the Muslim holy book, the Koran, to insult Muslim detainees. Several hundred students protested on Thursday in the Afghan capital Kabul. The unrest followed a 2,000-strong protest on Tuesday and riots on Wednesday in Jalalabad, in which four people were killed and the Pakistani consulate, foreign aid agencies, UN buildings, and diplomatic missions were attacked. The riots were triggered by a Newsweek magazine report that said US investigators probing abuse at the US military prison in Guantanamo Bay had discovered that interrogators "had placed Korans on toilets, and in at least one case, flushed a holy book down the toilet". Desecrating the Koran is punishable by execution in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. On Thursday, protests spread to other districts in eastern Afghanistan, as well as to the Pakistani cities of Peshawar and Quetta, close to the Afghan border. Police shot dead two more protestors in Jalalabad and one in the Wardak, a province that borders Kabul. The protesters chanted "Death to America" and called for assurances that the US would not maintain a long-term presence in Afghanistan.

Threatening Afghanistan's independence

Beyond the current desecration outrage, the students in Kabul were also engaged in other political issues, demanding that the Afghan government deny permanent military bases to the US. They said the creation of permanent US military bases would threaten the independence of Afghanistan. The demands come only days after US-backed Afghan President Hamid Karzai got green light from more than 1,000 tribal elders and officials to go ahead with a partnership with the US that would most likely include the creation of permanent US military bases in the country. Putting a new spin on the protests, Karzai used the riots in Jalalabad on Wednesday to justify a permanent US presence, saying that the violence illustrated Afghanistan's inability to deal with security threats on its own. Karzai commented on the events during a news conference at NATO headquarters in Brussels, RFE/RL reported. "The [protest] event this morning shows two things," he said. "One, that Afghanistan is a democratic state. Two, that Afghanistan, as [a] democratic state, is not yet ready with institutions to handle [the protest]." The specifically anti-American nature of the protests could jeopardize plans in Kabul and Washington to use Afghanistan as a permanent base for increasing US influence in Central Asia and the Middle East, containing Russian and Chinese influence in the region, and encircling Iran.

Still a foregone conclusion?

The US has long-term plans for Afghanistan, and until this week, the establishment of permanent US military bases in the country seemed more or less a foregone conclusion, with few obvious obstacles. The plans got a new boost in mid-February when US Senator John McCain visited Kabul and called for "joint military permanent bases" in Afghanistan, saying those bases would be "for the good of the American people, because of the long-term security interests we have in the region". Then, in mid-March, US Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman General Richard Myers told reporters in Kabul that the US Defense Department was studying the feasibility of such bases. In early April, Afghan Defense Minister General Abdul Rahim Wardak said Afghanistan was also seeking "enduring arrangements" with the US that could include permanent air bases or pre-positioned military equipment to be used by rapidly deployed US military forces in a crisis. Svante Cornell, deputy director of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, told ISN Security Watch that the Pentagon was seeking "forward bases that can be small in troop size but quickly be able to accommodate larger numbers". In a sign that work on "enduring arrangements" is indeed progressing, the US military announced on 28 March that it was spending US\$83 million on its two main air bases in Afghanistan, Bagram Air Base north of Kabul and Kandahar Air Field in the south of the country. When US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld made a surprise visit to Afghanistan on 13 April, both he and Karzai were non-committal about the bases issue, although it is believed they discussed the issue. Karzai told reporters he would ask US President George Bush for long-term security protection for his country - without specifying whether this would involve permanent bases. But Michael Shaikh, a Kabul-based analyst with the International Crisis Group (ICG) think-tank, told ISN Security Watch that Karzai did in fact ask Rumsfeld to set up permanent US military bases in his country.

Strategic reach

The US is keen to have a military presence in Afghanistan that can secure its long-term interests in the region. "It's not just Iran or drugs or something concrete and immediate - the goal seems to be strategic and long-term," Cornell says. For the future, the US envisages a wider area where military operations will be staged at short notice, stretching from North Africa to Southeast Asia -

including Central and South Asia. "Strategic reach is the issue," says Cornell. As such, Afghanistan is only part of a mosaic of US forward bases. The US already operates bases at Qarshi Khanabad Air Field in Uzbekistan and at Manas International Airport in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. And although the US has not officially requested permanent bases in those two Central Asian nations, Cornell says it is unlikely that the bases would be abandoned any time soon. "It's pretty nice to have a base near the Chinese border!" Cornell says. After his visit to Afghanistan, Rumsfeld did indeed drop by Bishkek to get assurances from the post-revolutionary leadership that the US presence at Manas would not be jeopardized. Shaikh agrees that containing China - and a Russia that is increasingly active in Central Asia - is a major factor.

Closing in on Iran

Another important country in the forward bases strategy is Azerbaijan. Cornell notes that at least once a year, Rumsfeld visits the country, which - like Afghanistan - can be used by the US to apply pressure on Iran. "The US wants to put pressure on Iran," says Shaikh. A long-term US presence in Azerbaijan and Afghanistan would all but close the US circle around the Islamic Republic. It is already present in Iraq and has warships in the Persian Gulf. And it seems to have a small but important foothold in Pakistan as well. Prominent US journalist Seymour Hersh in January wrote in the New Yorker magazine that US special forces were conducting reconnaissance missions in Iran from - and with the help of - Pakistan. The US denied the claims, but similar reports abound. Anonymous security sources in both Afghanistan and Pakistan told ISN Security Watch that CIA agents and US special forces were present in the western Pakistani province of Balochistan, which borders Iran. A Pakistani and a British journalist who had been investigating a possible US presence near the Iranian border told ISN Security Watch they had been told of a small US military base on the Pakistani coastal town of Jiwani, close to the Iranian border. But those reports could not be independently confirmed. "US special forces are sometimes cruising around in Balochistan," says Shaikh. And if the US is indeed planning covert operations against Iran, the Shindand Air Base in western Afghanistan, which is only some 100 kilometers from the Iranian border, is likely to play an important role, Shaikh says.

What's in it for Kabul?

The establishment of permanent US military bases in Afghanistan is likely to have detrimental effects for Afghan-Iranian relations. One Western diplomat in Afghanistan told ISN Security Watch that under such a scenario, Iran might use its considerable influence in western Afghanistan to the detriment of the US. But the US-backed Afghan government seems to be prepared to take that risk. And indeed, until this week, there was broad-based political support for a long-term US presence in the country. Shaikh notes that apart from the Taliban and warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar - both of whom are fighting to overthrow Karzai's government - there has been remarkable little opposition to the US presence, at least not until the reports of US interrogators desecrating the Muslim holy book. Shaikh says the authorities in Kabul fear that if US forces leave the area, the Taliban will return in the face of a weak Afghan National Army. And, clearly, the Taliban are still a threat. While US military officials say the Taliban has been severely weakened if not crushed, thanks to US-Afghan military operations to root them out and to the co-opting of some 50 high-ranking Taliban leaders into Karzai's government, recent attacks prove the contrary. Nick Downie of the Afghanistan NGO Security Office in Kabul says the attempt to include Taliban leaders in the government has made "no difference at all" to the intensity of the insurgency. And a recent suicide bombing at an internet café was the first such attack by the Taliban after one of its spokesmen had warned that the group would focus on suicide missions to achieve maximum results with minimum casualties for itself. Downie says the tactic works. If the Taliban manage to kill one foreigner, the entire region's aid organizations immediately evacuate, he says. The movement now might seek to take advantage of the anti-US protests. Afghan officials have already suggested that opponents of the US-backed government may have coordinated the violence. Karzai also believes the various warlords are likely to be more compliant as long as the US military is around. He seems to think that the US presence puts Kabul in a stronger position vis-à-vis its neighbor Pakistan in the disputes - particularly about border delimitation - that still abound.

Support for US bases

Observers believe that permanent US military bases could be established shortly after Afghanistan's parliamentary elections in September. The new parliament would have to approve the bases. Until recently, few analysts had expected any hitches in that process because it could count on broad-based political support. But this week's protests could signal problems ahead. Observers believe that if the opposition - led by Yunus Qanuni, the Tajik politician who lost the presidency to Karzai in October last year - could make gains in September's poll from anti-US sentiments by vocally opposing permanent US military bases in Afghanistan. "It's quite clear that Karzai's opponents will use the issue against him in the parliamentary elections," Wadir Safi, a

professor and a cabinet minister during the 1980s, told Reuters. In late April, before the riots, Qanuni indicated tacit support for the US presence in Afghanistan in an interview with the Pajhwok Afghan News agency. "Afghanistan must forge robust relations with [...] the United States," he said, but added that "under the constitution, any decision on permanent US bases in Afghanistan must be taken by Parliament, not the Presidency." But the unexpected development of public anti-US sentiments in the wake of the desecration report could very well provide Qanuni with the ammunition he needs for a September shakeup in Kabul that could hinder Washington's plans for a deeper strategic relationship with Afghanistan.

Source: Daan van der Schriek - ISN Security Watch's correspondent in Kabul, 12th May 2005. [home](#)

- **Aviation Security**

Three commercial airlines serve Afghanistan from Kabul International Airport. Pakistan International Airlines has three weekly flights to and from Islamabad. Azerbaijan Airways has three weekly flights to and from Baku.

The U.S. Embassy in Kabul strongly recommends against flying Ariana Afghan Airlines. As there is no direct commercial air service by local carriers at present, or economic authority to operate such service, between the U.S. and Afghanistan, the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has not formally assessed Afghanistan's Civil Aviation Authority for compliance with international aviation safety standards. However, in January 2004, the U.S. FAA reviewed the aviation safety assessment report prepared by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), which outlined significant safety deficiencies with Ariana Afghan Airlines. The FAA's review of the ICAO findings and interviews with Ariana Afghan Airlines officials identified significant safety deficiencies. Due to these findings, the U.S. government does not authorize official personnel to fly Afghan Ariana Airlines. **Source:** Overseas Security Advisory Council – 25th April 2005. [home](#)

- **ANSO FW: UN DSS CR DSS Security Advisory - Current Situation in Kabul: 14 May 2005**

Update 14 May, 08:50 hrs:

Information received indicating a potential gathering of local people west of the city within District 3 at Sayed Jamal Uddin area, the size of the crowd is reported to be around 50-60 individuals so far and are waiting to get enlarged for a possible demonstration. Police is present at the scene and monitoring the situation.

CR security office advises all Staffs to avoid unnecessary movements within this district until situation turns into normality.

Please monitor your radios for further advisories and update. **Source:** Yama Sahel, Assistant to Area Field Security Coordinating Officer, Kabul CR.(UNDSS), Afghanistan.

Mobiles: + 93 (0) 79 337 767 + 93 (0) 70 281 534 Ext: UNAMA: 6385 UNDP: 4204 – 14th May 2005. [home](#)

- **ANSO – Security Advice Kabul City - 14 May 2005**

Due to information received suggestion demonstrations that may take place in Kabul City we advise:

- No movement in or around the city
- Staff to be accounted for and to remain at compounds
- All compounds have alternate exits
- Grab bags ready
- Situation reports regarding any demonstration or other security concern should be passed to this office or that of UN DSS.

We are informed of one start point - "Fontana Blu" Square in Nadir Pashtoon area and the areas of Police District 6 & 7, south and south west of city centre. As with previous demonstrations they could manifest at and move to any location.

Source: Nick Downie, Head of Office, Programme Advisor, Afghanistan NGO Safety Office
email: coordinator@afgnso.org Mob: 0093(0)70 283320 Mob: 0093(0)79 322133 [home](#)

YOUTH UNITY MOVEMENT

Marching To a Different Tune - In An Unprecedented Move, Young People Across Afghanistan Have Set Aside Ethnic Differences To Campaign For National Unity

Hundreds of young men, fed up with the ethnic animosities that have long divided Afghanistan, are travelling the country preaching peace and brotherhood. "Just yesterday our youngsters were trying to kill one another, but today they're thinking about national unity and they want to live as brothers," said Haji Sarajuddin, a teacher from Kandahar province. Sarajuddin recently accompanied about 200 senior high school students from the traditional Pashtun stronghold in the south to Mazar-e-Sharif in the north, in an area where ethnic Tajiks and Uzbeks are in the majority.

The two regions came to symbolise the deep divisions that marked the years of strife of the Nineties. But in April, nearly 300 students in Mazar-e-Sharif warmly embraced their fellow countrymen from Kandahar when they met at a local hotel. The students, all in their teens or early twenties, were too young to have participated in the years of civil war.

"We know that due to the conflicts, a lot of distance has come between the peoples of Afghanistan," Mohammad Nazar, 23, told IWPR. "You can't bring about national unity by just talking, so about 30 of us at schools in Kandahar got together and decided to do something practical."

From the core group of 30, the unity movement boomed, said Nazar.

The young men say they have no political agenda other than reconciliation. They have taken their message not only to Mazar-e-Sharif, the capital of Balkh province, but also to other northern regions such as Parwan, Baghlan, Takhar and Kunduz, to Paktia and Zabul in the south, and to the capital Kabul and the nearby Wardak province.

Nazar said the group and its message have been welcomed everywhere. The students even met President Hamed Karzai, who endorsed their efforts.

"We had decided to pay the expenses of the tour by ourselves, but when the governor of Kandahar province heard about what we were doing, he paid all our costs," said Nazar.

"There was a lot of propaganda against the Mazar people in Kandahar province, and we thought we might not be welcome," said Shir Mohammad, another Kandahar student. "But then we came here and got to know the kids from Balkh.

"Now I feel like every part of Afghanistan is Kandahar, or home, for me."

The meeting in Mazar-e-Sharif ended with rounds of hugs, and students from both provinces chanted the group's motto, "We are neither Pashtun nor Tajik, neither Uzbek nor Hazara - we are merely Afghans and want to live as brothers in our country. We don't let anyone give us weapons or misuse us as in the past. Every province of Afghanistan is our home, and we want to build that home."

According to Farhad, who helped with arrangements for the visitors, more than 1,000 students from Balkh province have decided they too want to take that message on the road.

They were willing to pay their own expenses until the governor intervened.

"I'm ready to pay all the students' travel expenses personally if they want," said Balkh governor Atta Mohammad.

The grassroots movement has taken the authorities in Kabul by surprise. Abdul Khalil Qadis, secretary of the national youth ministry, said he was not aware of it until he was told by a reporter.

"Meetings like these are the only way to solve the problems left over from the war," said Ghulam Farooq Khepalwak, a political analyst and a teacher at Balkh University. "What these young people are doing is more effective than anything else, because they were not involved in the civil wars."

"I think they will succeed because they have more hope than we do about their future," said Sahib Jan, a 57-year-old shopkeeper in Mazar-e-Sharif.

"The future belongs to the youngsters."

Source: Sayed Yaqub Ibrahim - IWPR staff reporter in Mazar-e-Sharif - IWPR'S AFGHAN RECOVERY REPORT, No. 172, May 13, 2005. [home](#)

If you want further information on any of the above subjects please email Jeanne Bryer at Afghanlinks@aol.com

NB. All information contained here identifies the source and is shared with readers in good faith. If you find any incorrect details please let me know and they will be rectified immediately. *Afghan Links* is produced by Jeanne Bryer who formerly worked for the British and Irish Agencies Afghanistan Group and who currently works for Khorasan Orphanage in Kabul and the Kathy Evans Afghan Education Trust. If you no longer wish to receive the Afghan Links Newsletter please send an email to Jeanne Afghanlinks@aol.com and your address will be removed.

