

# PEACE IN FOCUS

Bringing peacebuilding stories to the frontpage

## Youth as agents of Peace



**“I want to make a difference”. Obet’s fight against discrimination**

**Exclusive: an interview with Afghan rock band Kabul Dreams**

**Leading for peace: the new African Youth Charter Hustlers initiative**

October 2021 - Issue N°1



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THE FACES OF PEACE

TUNE IN



# Come on in!

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A letter from  
our editor

For 76 years, the United Nations has been focusing its efforts on protecting the rights of people, promoting peaceful, just, and inclusive societies, and ensuring that the protection of our planet continues to be at the top of the Global Agenda. Making peace a reality for those who have lived in conflict, requires global and joint efforts, and young people have been showing remarkable leadership in taking this fight head on, and in ensuring a better future for all. It is the youth who, with their creativity, innovation and conviction, have achieved great transformations throughout history, in ways that inspire others today to keep dreaming of a world free of wars and conflict.

The COVID-19 pandemic, and the connected political and social crises that currently affect many parts of the world, have demonstrated the need for urgent and profound change. This is where the leadership of young people is absolutely fundamental: not only do their



actions directly contribute to consolidating a more prosperous future for all, but the objectives of the Sustainable Development Goal 16, to promote more just, peaceful and inclusive societies can only be attained if we actively include our youth.

In 2015, when the Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security, it recognized, for the first time, the key role of young people in preventing and resolving conflicts. It also underlined how young people are crucial for the achievement and sustainability of peace, because they have the opportunity to constructively



influence the actions that directly affect their lives. In whichever role they undertake, be it as Human Rights defenders, education providers, seekers of justice, peacekeepers, mediators involved in reconciliation processes in their communities, creators, or citizens, they all contribute to making peace a reality thanks to their concrete initiatives. Young people are agents of change, which is exactly what is needed to achieve peace.

In this first edition of Peace in Focus, the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) commemorates the International Day of Peace by demonstrating the value of young people working for peace from across the world. This publication aims to emphasize peace not merely as an abstract notion, but as an everyday commitment on the ground. This magazine's aim is to display how peace, in all its forms, is implemented through concrete initiatives and actions. The entire UNITAR group has worked to show how young, inspiring people are contributing to making peace a reality in various contexts, giving a voice to those often overlooked. I would like to extend my appreciation to everyone involved in conveying this important message.

In assembling and compiling these stories, we have been amazed at the extraordinary courage and conviction of young people across the globe. We hope you will enjoy reading these testimonies and that you will find them equally inspiring.

**Nikhil Seth**

**United Nations Assistant Secretary-General  
UNITAR Executive Director**



**“What I want is to make a difference”**

Photo courtesy: Rajab Said

## The story of Rajab

by Emad Rajab Said

Rajab comes from Sudan. After years as a refugee in Uganda, he decided to dedicate himself to building bridges between people and becoming a young peacebuilder. Discover the inspiring story of this changemaker.

My name is Emad Rajab Said. I am a Sudanese, from the Nuba Mountains. My family and I were forced out of our country by the horrible war that took place on June 6<sup>th</sup> 2011. That was the most terrifying moment of my life. When I first arrived in Uganda, I entered Kiryandongo refugee settlement, and I started a new life. It was not easy for a child to have a fresh start in a foreign country. Peace is the one thing that I had wanted since I was a baby. In 2017, I joined the Whitaker Peace & Development Initiative (WPDI) Training of Trainers (TOT) programme, and I was certified as a TOT Youth Peacemaker. Academically, I completed primary and secondary levels. I also have a certificate in cooperatives and business administration from the Uganda Cooperative College Kigumba.

My certification as a TOT has taken me closer to fulfilling my dreams. I want to create a better, peaceful tomorrow. I knew it was not an easy task, but I always believed that it was possible if I worked hard with other people. As a youth peacemaker in the refugee settlement, I participated in conflict resolution training in schools, in communities within and around the settlement. I also took part in mediation processes and community dialogues to solve, or find a way of settling, disputes in communities. The training has helped to promote a culture of peace, love and unity among the refugees and the host community. It has created a positive change as far as the reduction of domestic and tribal conflicts are concerned. I

also participated in radio talk shows, which have hugely contributed to teaching peace and conflict resolution to the neighboring communities. We reached different groups of local communities by employing different languages. This has helped to speed up the dissemination of peace messages to many people in a short time-frame and we received feedback from the listeners in a short time as well, which was positive and encouraging for us to keep teaching peace.

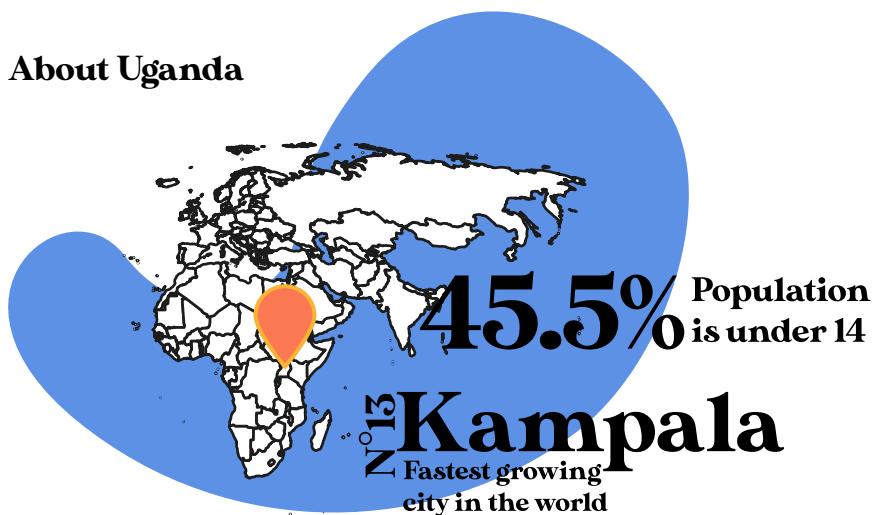
Most of the TOTs' work is with the youth and elderly people, but I chose to invest more time to work with a very special group of people: children. Children represent the future I am thinking about. If we can give our time to teach these children the importance of peace and love for each other regardless of tribal, religious, sexual or racial differences, we shall have a better, more peaceful tomorrow. It is not as easy as I am suggesting it to be. It takes a person to work extra hard because we need a project that makes all of them healthy for their social growth and mental fitness. I discovered that 100% of children love to play sports - 96% love football. Through its Peace Through Sports programme, WPDI combines sports practice with teaching on peace and respect. The initiative even includes a peace corporate league for adults. We also organize competitions and friendly matches for all categories. These tournaments have brought together different football players, including a girls' teams, who did very well nationally. This has created a healthy relationship among the players who grow more open and accepting of

their differences. Many players develop relations with players from opposing teams, including people from tribes that used to fight each other at home. This is a very good sign of peaceful coexistence among the young people and the adults in the community. Peace Through Sports has so much impact that I decided to devote myself to working full time on this initiative. I work harder every single day to ensure that the children have a peaceful environment, with love and respect for each other. Above all, we want them to understand that every person is equally important and that we need each other to achieve something bigger.

I am so happy that this project has impacted not only on children, but the whole settlement as well. Today we reach so many children who have organized themselves to emulate the Peace Through Sports programme and invite other friends for friendly matches and they even invite us back to visit them to see how they are doing. The children have learnt a lot. They are peaceful and happy and that makes me proud. Every day, we welcome more than 20 children and youth.

This has answered my questions on what I can contribute to my community. I work very hard every day, every week, every month to prepare the tomorrow I want to see. To make a positive change is all about having love and passion for what you are doing. I love what I am doing and am so passionate about it. What I want is to make a difference.

## About Uganda



WPDI under 14 football team  
(Peace Through Sports programme)

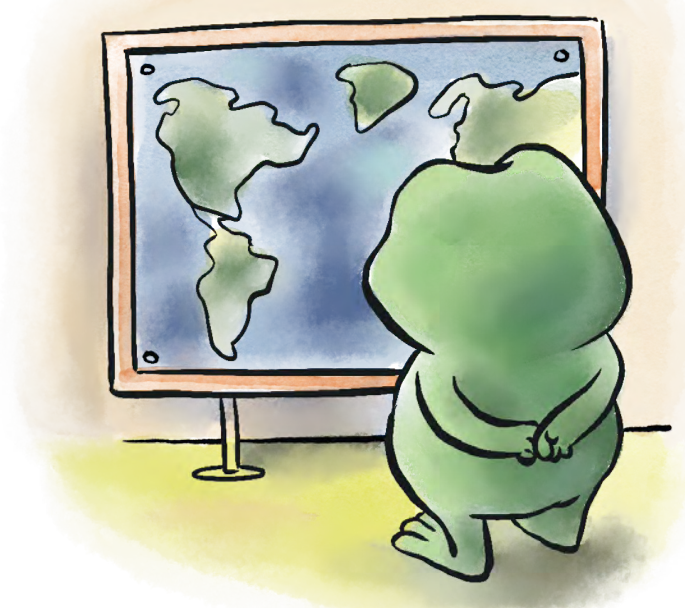
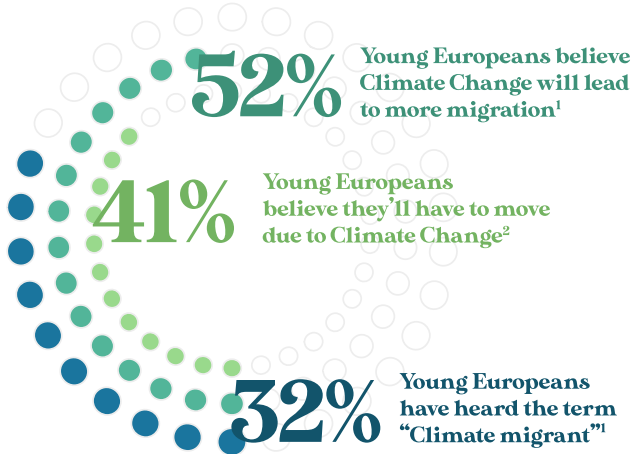
# Environments for Peace

## How the fight against climate change contributes to peacebuilding

The challenge to fight for better environmental policies that ensure society as a whole can adapt to climate change goes a long way, and although awareness is important, action is key. In this first edition, *Peace in Focus* wants to present how young Europeans can not only transform their local communities, but the world, in the context of a crisis that affects us at a global level in aspects beyond the environment.

### Looking at a global problem

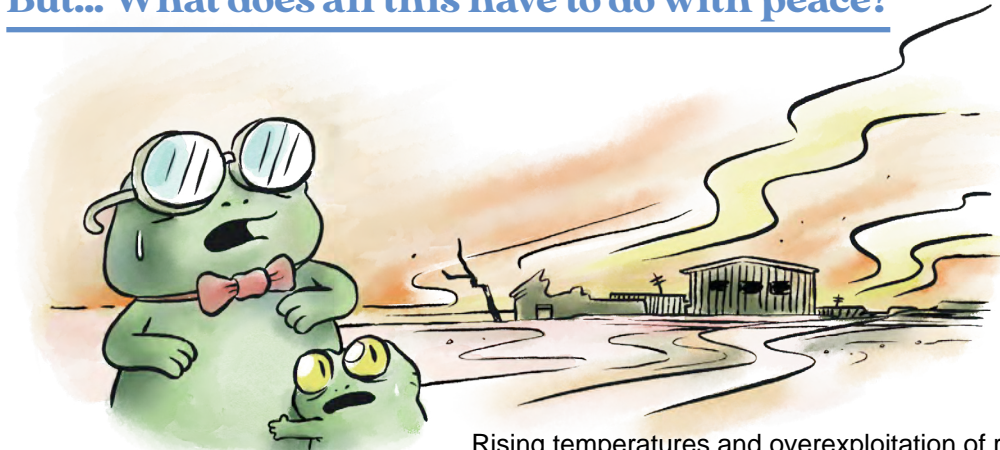
Year by year, the increased number of natural disasters linked to climate change has lead thousands of persons to flee their homes to find a safer future...



Disasters are making thousands of persons move away from their homes seeking safety, leaving behind their belongings and "starting over" in a new place.



### But... What does all this have to do with peace?



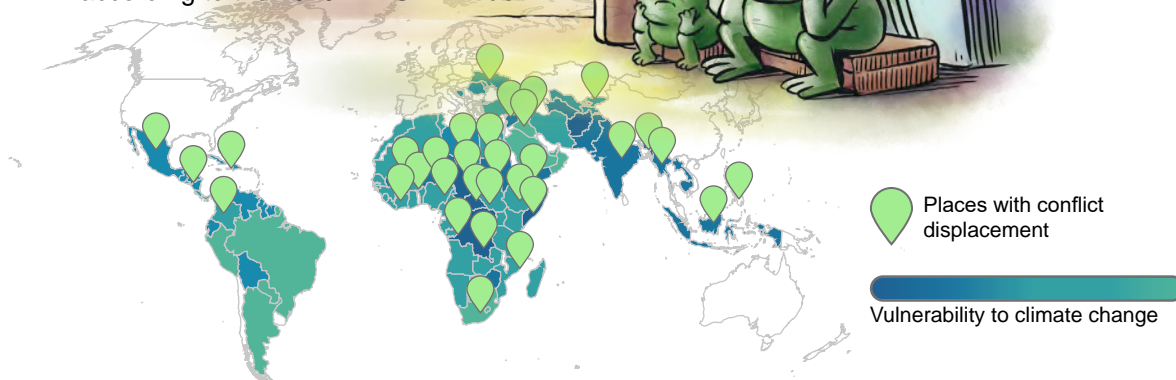
Rising temperatures and overexploitation of resources leads to scarcity, causing tensions and conflict among neighboring communities, which results in Displacement of Persons...





Communities living in a high-conflict area will probably have lack of access to a livelihood and will flee under very harsh circumstances, mostly to places that are not prepared to receive unexpected waves of persons, which also increases tensions among communities...

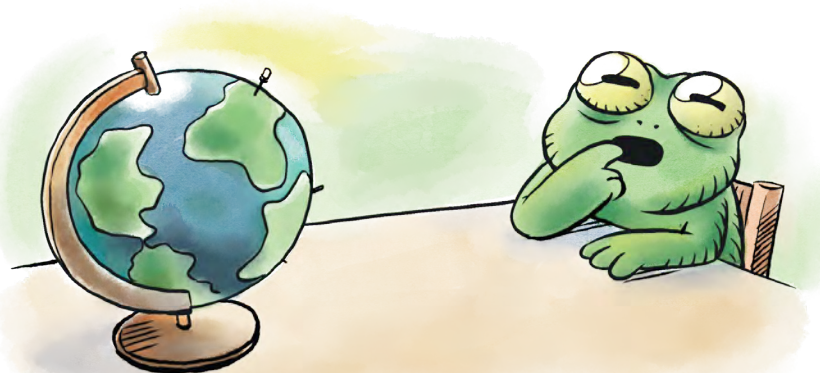
**95%** of conflict new displacements in 2020 happened in countries that have high or very high vulnerability to climate change according to the 2019 ND-GAIN Index<sup>4</sup>.



## What can be done?

You can join local environmental and youth organizations in order to reach out to politicians and policy makers so they<sup>5</sup>:

- Introduce an all-European label certifying (agricultural) products that meet both high ecological and high social standards, in a mid-term perspective ideally those standards should be obligatory for all products.
- Ban and penalize planned obsolescence for all products and control the implementation of the ban sufficiently.
- Support a quick transition to renewable energies and commit to a timely phase-out of coal. EU investments in renewable energy need to be made especially within the poorest regions of the EU.
- Provide green energy (electricity, heating) to student housing, publicly funded housing, public buildings, etc.
- Introduce programmes to protect future generations from environmental destruction and resource depletion and make sure trade with Europe does not harm other societies in this regard.



## Meet our character and his creator

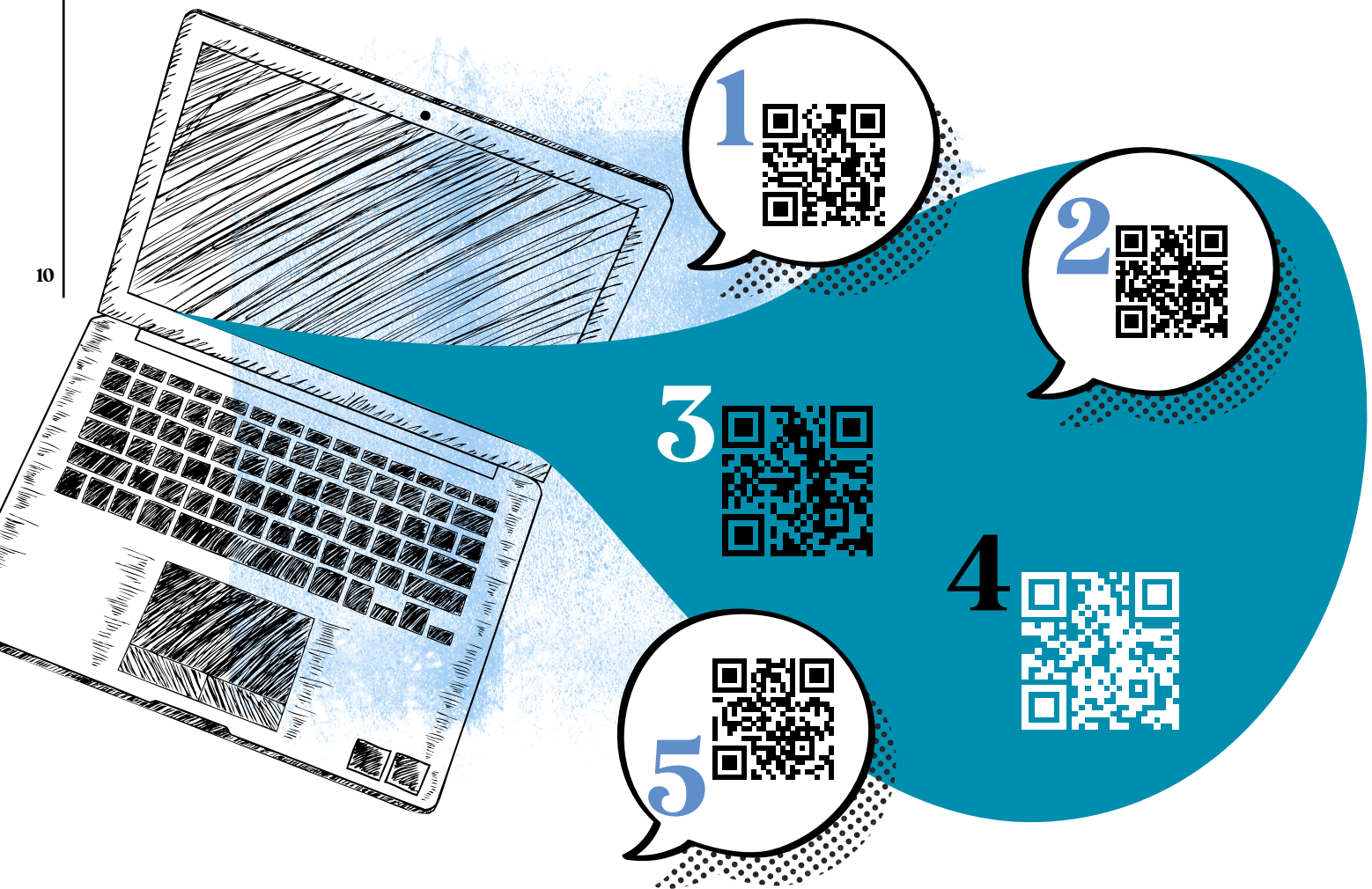
Small Lebowsky is not your regular frog, he's on a daily quest to find his place in the world, his mission, his way to make a change... whether that is by making others smile with his small -yet big- adventures, or by promoting inclusion and empathy one drawing at a time.

As a frog, Mr. Lebowsky is an indicator of how healthy an environment is, which is why *Peace in Focus* wanted to have him star in this piece.

But Mr. Lebowsky is not alone in the world: behind him is the amazing hand and creative mind of Khuslen Tsend, an Austrian artist of Mongolian heritage, whose background sharing with various cultures around the world allowed him to integrate the idea of empathy and inclusion -with a side of humour- into his 2D world.



## Want to know more? Check out our sources





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# “Now I am living my new, true life, I want to do my part for peace”

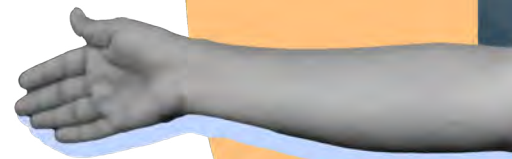
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For Obet David Aguirre, a 22-year-old Colombian, opening up about his sexual orientation led to rejection by his family. However, he managed to find a safe haven in the place he least expected.

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by **Laura Alejandra Cortés**

Photos by **Marcos Guevara**





In Colombia, more than 8 million people are affected by internal displacement due to conflict, as reported by the National Government's Single Registry of Victims. Obet is one of them, fleeing from his birthplace to start a new life in the city, far from his rural home village. He comes from Palmor, a small place founded by people who were fleeing the conflict. Located in the lush region of Magdalena, Palmor is full of beautiful landscapes, mountains and breathtaking waterfalls. Its fertile soil allows the year-round cultivation of a diverse array of fruits and vegetables, and it is home to the famous Colombian coffee, giving the town its nickname as the coffee capital of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta.

At only fourteen years old, Obet was forced to leave home to live alone in Barranquilla, a move he found very difficult. Barranquilla is a large port city of more than two million inhabitants and the capital of the Atlantico department. As victims of the conflict, Obet and his mother had received government housing as part of Colombia's resettlement programme. One of the conditions was that at least one member of the family had to live in the apartment, otherwise the government would hand it over to other victims of the conflict.

As his mother worked in another city, she was unable to take care of Obet, and he had to live in the apartment by himself. This is one example of the many social inequalities in which mothers must decide between taking care of their children or economically supporting their families. While living alone, Obet had to face all the challenges of adolescence without any kind of emotional support. His mother was not there for him.

This was a very difficult and lonely time for Obet and he called his mother every day to express his feelings. The owner of the local neighborhood store from which Obet made these calls, Mrs Adriana, listened in on the conversations and felt very sorry for the young man living without his mother. As coincidence would have it, Adriana was also alone. She told Obet that her husband, Jeison, was in jail for a crime that he had not committed. Over time, Adriana and Obet became great friends, they began to work together, they supported each other, and they grew so close that they lived together as mother and son for a short time. "I consider her as my mother, because she was there for me in a very difficult time" said Obet.

*Obet stares at the landscape in Tierra Grata, Cesar.*



# “I consider her as my mother, because she was there for me in a very difficult time”

–Obet

One day, Obet decided to confess to his biological mother that he was gay. His mother did not accept that her son was part of the LGBTQ+ community and rejected him. She once again left him to deal with this crucial moment in his life alone. Obet, saddened and disappointed by his mother's attitude, sought support again from Mrs. Adriana, whom he trusted. However, he was unable to find her, as she had left town. He eventually found her in a remote territory unknown to him. When he reached the area, a soldier from the Colombian National Army approached him. “They made me get off the motorcycle and searched me, and when I asked why, the answer I got is that I was in a reincorporation zone.” The soldier explained: “This is where those who used to make up the FARC guerrillas live.” Obet found himself in one of the 24 Territorial Training and Reincorporation Spaces – ETCRs as they are known in Colombia – which were established as part of the Peace Agreement between the Government of Colombia and the FARC in 2016. In these places, located throughout the country, former combatants who had put down their weapons were being transitioned into civilian life. This is currently the situation of 13,360 former FARC combatants accredited by the Office of the High Commissioner for Peace, in a commitment to continuing on the path of peace.

## The meeting that gave Obet peace

When he arrived at the Tierra Grata ETCR, in the Cesar department, Obet initially struggled to understand why Adriana and her husband were living there. “Adriana hugged me and said: I'm glad you're here. We need to talk. She confessed to me that she and her husband used to be members of FARC, that she had been imprisoned for state rebellion, and that thanks to the peace process she had been released. I was very confused. I'm not going to deny that I stigmatized them, all of them, because I had a very different idea of guerrillas “.

For Obet it was challenging to be in FARC territory, he had many negative perceptions of this community of ex-combatants: he had, himself, been a victim of the conflict. Although the peace agreement has resulted in many benefits for the territories affected by the conflict, there is still a long way to go to heal the deep wounds left by the violence. Furthermore, much work remains to be done to break the stigmas that society holds against people in the process of reintegration. For Obet, this negativity didn't matter. He was only concerned with escaping the prejudices and rejection that he had experienced from his own family. He was looking for a refuge, a place where he could express himself freely without being judged or discriminated against. “When I got to know the place, I was surprised and I started to change my way of seeing them.

Where I come from the most important thing is individualism, and here what matters is the collective, they are like one single family, where, in addition, my sexual orientation is not a problem”.

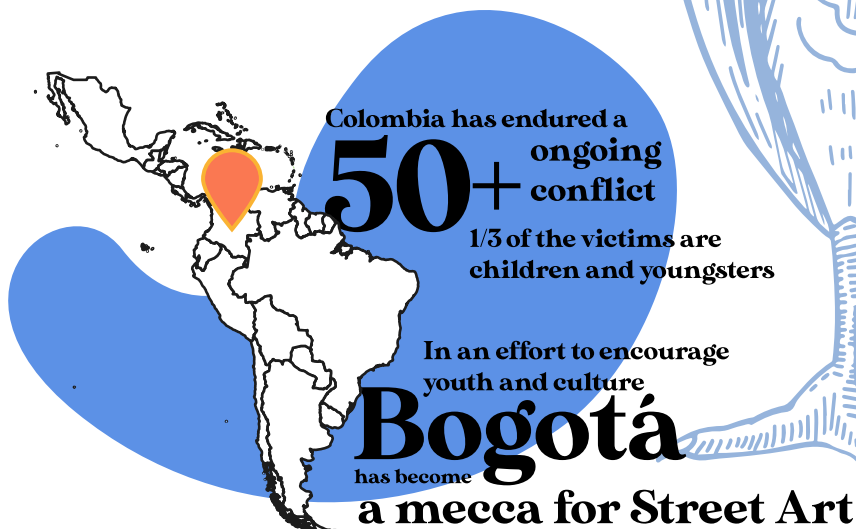
At the Tierra Grata ETCR, Obet got the opportunity to start his professional studies as a food salesman. He also gained his diploma in capacity building for territorial development, and was able to study photography, one of his passions. Due to his leadership capacities, he has participated in different youth projects with the UN Verification Mission and with the United Nations Institute for Training and Research – UNITAR.

Obet has finally found freedom. The ETCR and the community of ex-combatants gave him the peace that he had been searching for in his life. He found a family and a space where he felt included and respected. “Here I could be free, I could be myself, among other things, because Adriana always knew that I was gay.” Adriana and her husband would go on to live elsewhere, in the department of Tolima, but Obet decided to stay in Tierra Grata because he remains grateful for what has been done for him there and he wants to contribute back to the community to which he now belongs.

Obet left behind experiences of rejection and showed that it is possible to strengthen the bonds of reconciliation while breaking the barriers created by social stigmas. Also, he highlights the importance of involving young people in peacebuilding processes as key agents of change, and to reform the structures that promote violence. All of this is needed to contribute to the reconstruction of the social fabric of a society that has been torn apart by war for too long. Obet is a young dreamer, who longs to live in a peaceful country where the rights of all people are respected. “Now I am living my new life, my true life. I want to be a psychologist and do my part for peace”.



## About Colombia





Peace in Focus thanks Mr. Carlos Barbosa, who conducted the original interview that made this article possible, and the UN Verification Mission in Colombia for their support.





# Africa's young hustlers

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## The struggle for empowerment and recognition of Africa's youth

by **Santiago Londono Suarez**

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Africa boasts the world's youngest population. Over 70% of the continent's population is under 35 years old. Despite this overwhelming reality, young people in Africa have struggled for recognition and participation within its political, economic and social structures. The Hustlers are here to try and change that. The challenge is enormous, but 110 young men and women have stepped up to overcome it.

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As tears of excitement run down Yasmina Benslimane's cheeks, she rushes to Twitter to tell the world that she has just been selected as one of the 110 representatives who will make up the African Youth Charter Hustlers initiative. "I felt so proud, I told my mom right away, she was so proud as well. It was a great moment. I thought about my grandpa and how proud he would have been, I vowed to carry on his legacy as the great pan Africanist that he was."



Like Yasmina, 54 other women and 55 men were selected out of more than 2100 applicants to be the leaders of the AYC Hustlers initiative and represent each of the African Union's 55 member states. Their endeavor began in 2020 and is planned to last two years.

Together, the Hustlers lead an effort for the mobilization of Africa's youth. While this initiative revolves strongly around advocating for the signing, ratification and implementation of the African Youth Charter within all member states, it goes far beyond it as well. The initiative also seeks to give the youth the role they deserve within their local, national, and regional decision-making structures. It is providing the youth with an opportunity to lead by example and inspire

others to understand that they represent the future.

## The African Youth Charter

On July 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006, the African Union adopted the African Youth Charter (AYC) "recognizing that the youth are partners, assets and a prerequisite for sustainable development and for the peace and prosperity of Africa with a unique contribution to make to the present and to future development."

This rights-based legal and political framework was agreed upon as a tool for the empowerment, protection and engagement of the continent's youth. However, in 2019, 13

years after its adoption, 16 of the 55 member states had not ratified the charter, and 12 had not signed it. Many of those who have signed it have struggled with its implementation. The need for an innovative solution became evident, and the AYC Hustlers were born. Spearheaded by the African Union Office of the Youth Envoy, with the support of the Department of Human Resources, Science and Technology, and in collaboration with the Regional Economic Communities, and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research, this initiative gives the youth the power to take advocacy and accountability for their futures into their hands. The backing of the African Union and international organizations gives them the legitimacy they deserve. Despite this high-level advocacy, some Hustlers

recognize the work they do at a grass roots level as the true game changer.

“AYC Hustlers meet with youth-led organizations across the continent to learn about their work, the communities they serve, and the resources they need. We conduct surveys and polls with youth to determine priority issues for our advocacy areas. We ensure that local youth can lead the conversation on how progress is achieved in their society. The unique position of the AYC Hustlers within the African Union provides us with a pivotal role in connecting the continent’s political and diplomatic representatives with young leaders” as Nandini Tanya Lallmon from Mauritius explains.

The Hustlers’ connection with Africa’s youth through social media, forums, meetings, and a never-ending list of mediums allows firsthand and deep insight into the needs, dreams, and motivations of their people. As the continent strides for unity, peacebuilding and a more inclusive society that overcomes the marginalization of young people, their work holds the keys to unlocking effective, thoughtful, and innovative ways of tackling modern problems.



Photo courtesy: Yasmina Benslimane

▲  
Yasmina Benslimane, Representative of Morocco

**“A hustler is a person that does not wait for things to happen, we do not wait for things to come to us, we go and get things done. That’s what it means for me to hustle, we are people with a leadership mentality”**

**–Yasmina Benslimane**



Photo courtesy: Iris Nzolantima

▲  
Iris Nzolantima, Representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo

### **The AYC Hustlers work for peace**

Article 17 of the AYC is dedicated to the actions that must be taken to ensure peace and security. It recognizes the important role of the youth in promoting peace and non-violence, while also focusing on the physical and psychological scars that result from violence, armed conflict and war.

The article combines education, reparation, psychological recovery, conflict resolution, and reintegration as some of the main pillars for peacebuilding amongst young people. The article, as well as the Hustlers themselves, recognize that achieving peace should not only be a concern for the countries that have active armed conflicts. Peace is understood as a broad concept that relies heavily on the integral well-being of a society and on an idea that the Hustlers love to fight for: unity.

“Peacebuilding is something that is often overlooked in countries that do not have armed conflict or are not in war. I believe peace is not only the absence of violence, but peacebuilding is also the promotion of unity and working for a common goal, it means promoting gender equality, agenda 2063, social justice, economic justice, environmental justice, political participation. These are the things that will bring a sustainable peace to the continent. Therefore, it is important to promote the AYC and other frameworks that advocate for these values” according to Yasmina Benslimane.

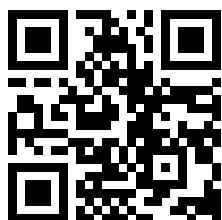
It is mainly on this ambition for unity, understanding and the strengthening of social bonds that the Hustlers have centered their efforts for a more peaceful continent. The Hustlers get Africa’s youth talking between them, getting to know each other, and understanding that they are not alone. Grassroots organizations and individuals have seen that it is possible to advocate at the highest level despite your age. They have seen it is possible to be young and lead.

The journey has just begun, the Hustlers still have a long way to go, but with some of the continent’s brightest leading hand in hand with the continent’s youth, the expectations are high.

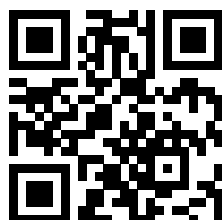
*Nandini Tanya Lallmon, Young Hustlers Initiative*



## Want to know more? Check out these materials



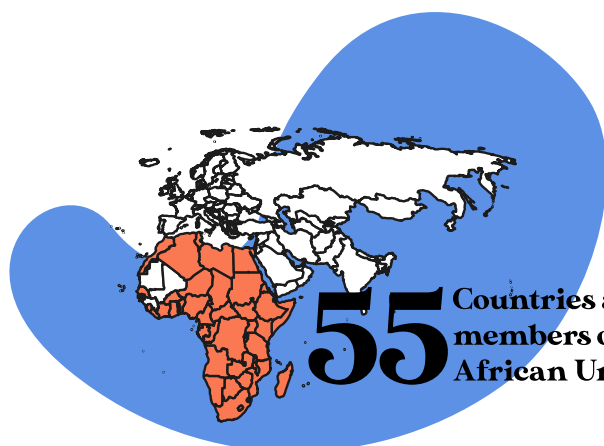
Hustlers'  
E-book



African Youth  
Charter



## About the African Union



**55** Countries are  
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African Union



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UN Photo/Mark Garten

## They teach us: Malala Yousafzai

Malala Yousafzai became known to the world as the young girl who defied the Taliban in Pakistan, demanding that young girls receive an education. Ever since Yousafzai was a child, she had been active in advocacy for girls' education, ultimately making her a target with a death threat issued against her.

Born on July 12<sup>th</sup> 1997, in Swat, Pakistan, Malala Yousafzai attended the school her father, educator Ziauddin Yousafzai, had founded. After the Taliban began attacking girls' schools, Yousafzai gave a powerful speech, "How dare the Taliban take away my basic right to education?" in Peshawar, Pakistan, in September 2008. At the age of 11, Malala began blogging for the BBC about living under the Taliban's threats to deny her an education. To hide her identity, she used the pseudonym Gul Makai. However, Yousafzai's identity was eventually revealed in December of that year.

As she began to grow her platform, Malala continued to speak out about her right, and the right of all women, to have an education. Her activism resulted in her nomination for the International Children's Peace Prize in 2011. That same year, she was awarded Pakistan's National Youth Peace Prize. Yousafzai and her family then learned about the Taliban's death threat on her life due to her activism. Although she was frightened, Yousafzai was more frightened for the safety of her father, since she and her family initially felt that the fundamentalist group would not harm a child.

On October 9<sup>th</sup> 2012, a gunman shot Malala when she was travelling home from school. Despite this attempt, she never stopped her fight for girls' education and there was an outpouring of support for her worldwide. After her 2013 speech at the United Nations, former Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon pronounced July 12<sup>th</sup> – Yousafzai's birthday – 'Malala Day' in honour of the young leader's activism to ensure education for all children.

Following her speech at the United Nations, Malala Yousafzai was repeatedly recognised for her fight for girls'

**“I used to think I had to wait to be an adult to lead. But I’ve learned that even a child’s voice can be heard around the world.”**

education. Most notably, at the age of 17, she became the youngest person to receive the Nobel Peace Prize, in October 2014, for her advocacy work.

Now, at the age of 24, Malala Yousafzai has written three books, graduated from Oxford University, was named one of Time Magazine's 100 Most Influential People in the World, graced the cover of British Vogue, and achieved many more accomplishments in her fight for girls' education. She continues her advocacy for girls through her foundation, the Malala Fund. Launched in 2013 together with her father, the foundation seeks to ensure that girls worldwide have access to 12 years of free, safe and quality education.



**“I speak – not for myself, but for all girls and boys.  
I raise up my voice – not so that I can shout, but so that  
those without a voice can be heard.**

**Those who have fought for their rights:**

**Their right to live in peace.**

**Their right to be treated with dignity.**

**Their right to equality of opportunity.**

**Their right to be educated.”**

*Malala Yousafzai, excerpt from Malala's Speech at the  
United Nations on July 12<sup>th</sup> 2013*



Speech to  
Canadian  
Parliament



Short documentary: “Class  
Dismissed: Malala's story” by  
Adam B. Ellick



## Peace in an image: ArtLords

How to turn a grey wall into a canvas and a universal call for peace? This is the mastery of ArtLords, an Afghan art collective, directed by M. Omaid Sharifi. This powerful mural was painted on the walls of the Sayed ul Shuhada school following the explosions that killed 90 female Hazara students in Kabul in May 2021. After the attack, the street artists invited the school's children to paint this artwork with them. With over 2000 murals across Afghanistan, ArtLords has transformed the country's streets into open galleries "to give a visual voice to the voiceless", but most of them have been painted over since the Taliban's return to power.



## Music as a universal language for peace: An interview with Afghan rock band

# Kabul Dreams

Interview conducted by Maria Argel Guerra



Photo: Kabul Dreams

**Dreaming is a recurrent topic of your songs and features heavily in your lyrics as well as in the band's name. Why do you think it is so important to dream?**

**Qardash:** *Dream, as when you wish something. I think everything starts from that, you want to do something, you set a goal and then you want to achieve it. It is important to know what you want in life. You can dream of a pair of cigarettes, you*

*You can roam the streets of Kabul listening to rock 'n' roll when you watch the official video of [Air by Kabul Dreams](#). You start your trip driven by the soft and persistent arpeggio of a solo guitar. Then a voice calls: "Don't listen to anyone, just listen to me". The drums indicate the moment you realize your heart is beating. "I am on the air; I can see you flying to me". Everything then enters a fast motion sensation, into a place where nothing seems to relate to your mind but only to your heart. And then you could just dance.*

*Sulyman Qardash, the lead singer of Kabul Dreams, talked to us about dreams, peace, youth and rock 'n' roll.*

*can dream of being in a band or you can dream of being a photographer, you can dream of anything you want. That's the first step towards achievement.*

*When I started playing music and when I moved back to Afghanistan, I was a teenager and I dreamt of creating a band and playing rock 'n' roll in Afghanistan. We didn't have any prior examples of bands whose steps to follow in nor any structure of "this is what you do". That wasn't available for us. When I met Siddique and Mojtaba, I think that was the best thing that happened in*

*my life at that time. Not only did I meet two band members, but I became close friends with two people that in ideology, mentality... our jokes, our taste in music, everything matched. I think we all wanted to do something, and I think it was good chemistry and combination. That we met each other, that was the dream, that was literally a dream come true.*

Kabul Dreams was formed in 2008. Sulyman (voice/guitar), Siddique (bass) and Mojtaba (drums) met in Afghanistan. They played in friends' houses, private universities, and places where normally nobody played. They invited friends and their friends did the same, and after a while their audience consisted of more unknown people than known. After many attempts, with Sadae Man (2010) ("My Voice" in Dari), a song about the need to write to unite people in Afghanistan, they made it onto radio, which was a very powerful media in Afghanistan because of limited access to internet and electricity. "When you are in Kabul, in the back seat of a taxi and then you're listening to your own music on the radio and the driver is enjoying it, that's when you think 'oh, I made it'", says Sulyman.

Currently, the band is composed of Sulyman, Siddique and Jai Dhar, who joined them as the new drummer in 2018. They have released three albums and several singles. The lyrics often stress the importance of music to open dialogue, promote peace and understanding.

**What do you think the relationship between peace, music, in your case rock 'n' roll, and youth is?**

**Qardash:** *When you are a teenager, when you are young, whatever music you listen to, it kind of hits you. I always joke to my friends: "I judge all of you based on the music that you listen to". Rock*

*'n' roll gave me a lot of hope, rock 'n' roll gave me a lot of passion. I was a refugee, all I had was music, I didn't understand a single word that they would sing in English because I didn't even know English back then. But then there was a riff, there was energy. You don't need to know the lyrics to connect. I used to listen to a lot of Nirvana songs, and I never really understood anything they said. But then there was a passion. And there was always a trio, three people in a band, a small number of people making a massive noise. I thought "I love this, that's great, that's what I want to do". It seemed doable to me, when I saw these bands, it made me believe that I could do it too.*

**Formed in 2008, your band blazed a trail for other rock bands. To what extent do you think music and art can help bring peace and build bridges between societies?**

**Qardash:** *Fashion, music, art, it gives you hope, it gives you positivity, but it doesn't solve any*

**“When you are in Kabul, in the back seat of a taxi and then you're listening to your own music on the radio and the driver is enjoying it, that's when you think 'oh, I made it'”**

*political issues, it doesn't put food on your table when you listen to my music, and I don't think you should be really expecting that from any artist. But at the same time, especially now, given the situation, we have a platform and I think we have an obligation to use it. When we come out with the music, we are not trying to solve any political problem, we are not politicians, we have an opinion individually or as a group, we have an*

*opinion of what's going on, but what I am going to sing isn't going to put food on any table, and I need to acknowledge that. We want people to know that in the last twenty years a lot of changes happened, including us, Kabul Dreams happened in the last twenty years. That's progress.*

For Sulyman, the band grew up during the last decade: they started having other concerns, they stopped being teenagers and began questioning the authorities, wondering about injustice and why things work the way they do. When they cannot find these answers, all that is left is to let their anger out through music.



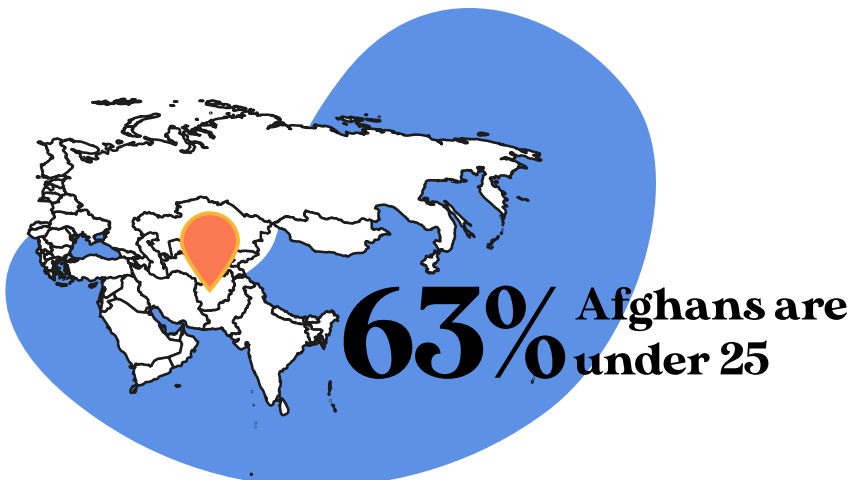
**Do you think that growing up in a society that was torn by war has influenced your song writing and the unique energy you display on stage?**

**Qardash:** *Oh yeah, it does. Not only at song writing, but also as a person, as a human. All your experiences will never leave you. Growing up as a refugee, going back and forth between countries, going back to your country, coming out, going back again. It shapes you as a person, it affects your song writing. If I had grown up in a happier place, sort of a more peaceful place, my songs probably would have been more peaceful. It is what it is. I wouldn't change anything because I don't know what it's like to be on the other side. Those are my experiences, those are my memories. That's one of the things that haunts me and kills me. That makes me super angry: all the memories I have from the country will be taken away and they'll be gone.*

**Don't miss out on the band's music**



**About Afghanistan**



# Peace in Focus recommends

## Walking toward Peace

By Kathleen Krull, Annie Bowler

Peace Pilgrim was the woman who chose and wore her name. In 1908 she was born as Mildred Lisette Norman; forty-five years later she decided to dedicate her life entirely to talking to people about peace, her name no longer belonged to her. She walked across the United States six times and died in the middle of her seventh journey. She had no money and no material possessions; she spent twenty-seven years spreading the belief that peace is possible and starts as a personal healing process.

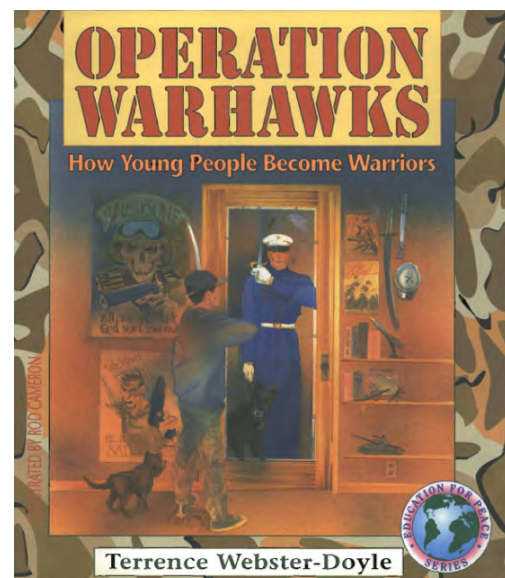
In this book, Kathleen Krull and Annie Bowler, through a precise narrative using words and illustrations, convey the bravery of human beings to the reader, as well as their tenderness. Mainly aimed at an audience of children and young people, this book is a great way of getting to know Peace Pilgrim's story.



## Operation Warhawks

By Terrence Webster-Doyle

“This book is intended to disturb you”, says Terrence Webster-Doyle. Starting with his experience of having been a warrior, this book wants to question all the possible motivations that could lead a young person to becoming an actor of war. Concepts such as glory, honor and patriotism are put in doubt. It is a fervent request to young people to stop and think about what to believe and who to obey. Webster-Doyle wants the reader to realize how unreasonable war is, and how humankind could, instead, bet on peace. Mainly written for young people (between ages 12 to 15), this book shares valuable insights on how using different methods to improve mental strength can be a solution to avoiding war and violence.

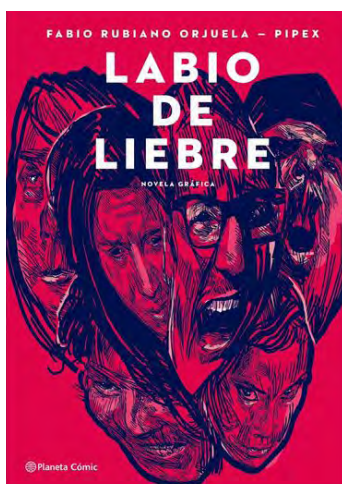


## Peace and Conflict: Understanding our world

By Queens University Belfast, Northern Ireland

This podcast presents the concepts of peace and conflicts to its audience in their dissected appearance. It explores gender perspectives and provides psychological, economic, political, and historical insights on how conflict and peacebuilding work in different parts of the world: in Afghanistan, Colombia, Northern Ireland, South Africa, and the Middle East.

The faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences of Queens University Belfast has created this series based on the research work of academics on the topic of conflict. They explore the relationship between local and national engagement with peace in Afghanistan; the process of understanding and acknowledging psychological trauma and mental suffering in war victims; the intersection between gender and categories such as race, social class, sexuality, etc. and many other interstices within the big and complex dynamics of war and peace. It is a great resource for students in the field of Peace and Conflict Studies.



## Labio de liebre

By Fabio Rubiano Orjuela, Pipex

*Labio de liebre* was originally a play written by Fabio Rubiano about Salvo Castello, a man who is serving his sentence in a cold Nordic country for the numerous crimes he committed in the past, during the Colombian civil war. Ghosts have started visiting him and they push him into a memory exercise to move him, and the reader, towards forgiveness, justice, and peace. Rubiano successfully rebuilds the victims' characters. The ghosts are not sorrowful beings but comical ones who take Castello on a journey within his own being.

This powerful book version of the play comes in the form of a graphic novel with drawings by Pipex, a Colombian artist whose work shows us the chaotic effect of recalling painful events and places where people were driven away from peace.



# Who to follow

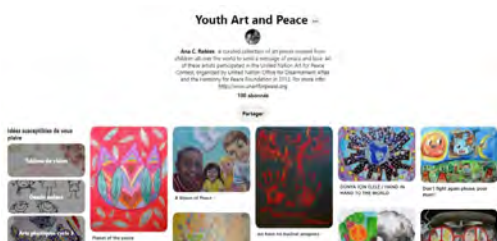
## Youth, art and peace

Curated by Ana C. Robles

A Pinterest account dedicated to curating beautiful art pieces featured at the United Nations Art for Peace Contest, organized by United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs and the Harmony for Peace Foundation. All the artists featured range from ages 5 to 17, and many of the subjects of their artwork focuses on the thematic, “Imagine a World Free of Nuclear Weapons.”

Ana C. Robles is an Art Educator based in New Jersey, USA.

To explore the page in full view and to learn more, [click here.](#)

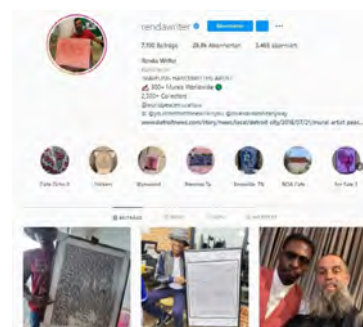


## World peace mural tour

Founded by Renda Writer

Started in 2016, the World Peace Mural Tour is the brainchild of Miami, Florida-based handwritten artist, Renda Writer, who travels across the United States and the world to create murals that has “World Peace” written all over it. Deeply inspired by the Gandhi quote “Be the change you wish to see in the world”, the murals aim to achieve peace through the power of the written words and the influence of public art.

Presently, there are [81 murals that have been created in eight different countries](#), and they are all visible on the dedicated Instagram account. To view more of this impactful peace initiative, [click here.](#)





# How much do you know about peace?

## Challenge yourself with this quiz about peacebuilding!

**1.** Which member of the famous band The Beatles once said: *“Peace is not something you wish for. It’s something you make, something you do, something you are and something you give away”*?

- a. Paul McCartney
- b. John Lennon
- c. George Harrison

**3.** Which country does peace activist Rigoberta Menchú, who asserted: *“Peace is not only the absence of war. As long as there is poverty, racism, segregation and exclusion, we could hardly reach a world of peace”* come from?

- a. Mexico
- b. Peru
- c. Guatemala

**5.** For what reason were Nadia Murad (Iraq) and Denis Mukwege (Democratic Republic of the Congo) awarded a joint Nobel Peace Prize in 2018?

- a. For their efforts to end the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war .
- b. For their fight for banning and clearing of anti-personnel mines.
- c. For their extensive efforts to eliminate chemical weapons.

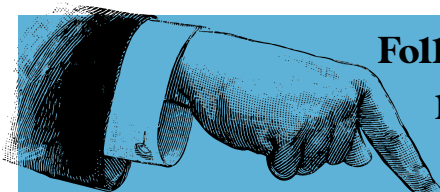
**2.** Nelson Mandela, the political prisoner who later became president of his country, once said: *“If you want to make peace with your enemy, you have to work with your enemy. Then he becomes your partner”*.

What was the name of the South African president who became his partner?

- a. Desmond Mpilo Tutu
- b. Frederik Willem de Klerk
- c. Thabo Mvuyelwa Mbeki

**4.** When was the first Nobel Peace Prize awarded?

- a. 1795
- b. 1901
- c. 1990



Follow the links to learn more:



Answers: 1. b; 2. b; 3. c; 4. b; 5. a.



# Even after getting vaccinated

- . Wear a mask
- . Keep a safe distance
- . Avoid crowds
- . Open windows
- . Clean your hands
- . Cover coughs and sneezes

To stay safe from COVID-19, do it all!



World Health  
Organization

Bringing peacebuilding stories  
to the frontpage

