

# Rutgers Humanist

A MAGAZINE OF TRANSNATIONAL CONNECTIONS  
Special Edition: Imagine: NextGen Voices Reflect on Peace



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# Map of Imagine Youth Fellows:

01

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## United States

California, Florida, Georgia, Maryland,  
New York, Puerto Rico, South Carolina  
Texas, Washington, D.C.



## Globally

Afghanistan, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada,  
Colombia, England, El Salvador, Indonesia, Lebanon,  
Northern Ireland, Poland, Palestine, Rwanda,  
Sudan, Ukraine

# Introduction to the Special Edition and the Imagine Fellowship

02  
Editor's  
Note

By Elana Haviv, Ph.D.

Founder & Executive Director, Generation Human Rights  
Visiting Scholar, CGHR, Rutgers University, Special Edition Guest Editor

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Over the summer of 2025 and into the autumn, the Generation Human Rights Fellows embarked on an extraordinary journey, diving deep into their work with unwavering courage and fierce emotion. These high school and college students came together from around the world to immerse themselves in the stories that needed to be told, stories of families torn apart, young souls living in exile, and classrooms shattered by bombs, all accompanied by a fragile yet resilient hope for peace and a unified future.

Words cannot fully express the deep admiration I feel for these remarkable young storytellers. Their path was anything but straightforward. What began as brainstorming sessions evolved into profound research projects. They collaborated and supported one another, transforming into passionate researchers. It was through this collective effort that they were able to conduct interviews that painted the bigger picture of their human rights topics. They sought out voices across continents, weaving a tapestry of experiences and insights together.

I struggle to find the right words to encapsulate the true essence of their journeys. Each story is a testament to resilience, a call for justice, and a beacon of hope shining brightly in the darkest of times. I feel honored to be a witness as they built their collective strength to tell these stories and share their own truths.

I would like to express my gratitude to the Center for the Study of Genocide and Human Rights at Rutgers University for inviting Generation Human Rights to guest-edit this issue of the Rutgers Humanist Magazine. I'm especially grateful to Nela Navarro, Associate Director and Director of Education at CGHR, for her guidance and support throughout this process. In a time when it's essential to amplify shared voices, especially those that have been silenced, we deeply appreciate this opportunity.

# What Peace Means:

Voices and  
Perspective  
from the  
Youth Authors

03



## Peace Definitions Illustration

The artwork symbolizes peace as an active journey, a conscious crossing from chaos to calm, from division to unity. The open door and the bird embody liberation, while the mirrored landscapes and color balance speak to harmony and inner stillness.

Peace, here, is portrayed not as static but as a flowing, transformative experience.

# What Peace Means:

Voices and  
Perspective  
from the  
Youth Authors

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## Zarafshan Hussaini:

Peace, to me, means reclaiming freedom, safety, respect, and dignity for Afghan girls: the freedom to speak openly, share thoughts, and raise our voices without fear. It means access to education from school through university, regardless of gender, and not being treated as tools for survival, sold into early marriages. Peace means traveling alone safely, without needing a male guardian. Peace includes walking in parks, playing sports, and enjoying morning walks freely. It grants the right to choose our clothing and dress freely, work in fields we love, and live independently, not dependent on males. It means living without bombs in a safe, supportive, equal community.

## Swara Gowdra:

According to Merriam-Webster, peace is defined as a state of tranquility or quiet. Cambridge Dictionary defines it as freedom from war and violence, especially when people live and work together happily without disagreements. I disagree. A state of calm might be a precursor to peace, but it does not solely define the term. Being happy and free of disagreements are linked to conflict avoidance and suppressed emotions. So what exactly is peace? I believe there is no solid definition of peace. To me, peace is an internal feeling; a feeling of wholeness and worrylessness. It is the absence of stress and agitation and depending on the environment and influence of different factors, peace means something different to each individual person.

## Sonja Vinh-Thomas:

Peace is more than a feeling. It means a world where war no longer tears families apart, where women have full rights over their bodies, and where children can play without fear. It's the end of gun violence and police brutality. It's where equity, diversity, and inclusion are more than just values, but realities. Peace is access to education, healthcare, and safety. It's a country that welcomes the immigrants who helped build it. It's the quiet that lets you breathe, think, and feel safe. Peace is not just the absence of violence, but the presence of justice, safety, and belonging for everyone.



Photo by Jack Picone / The VII Foundation

# What Peace Means:

Voices and  
Perspective  
from the  
Youth Authors

03

## Isabella McAllister:

Peace to me is the understanding that all people have the right to be loved. If you look for love you will find it even in the most chaotic and violent times. View yourself as a beacon of hope. View yourself as a river of sensitivity. That is how we heal, that is how we connect, and that is how we know peace. View yourself as love and it will be with you wherever you go. Peace to me is reminding yourself that we exist here just as much as the trees do. They give oxygen, they give life, and flourish in the soil. We need to exist like the trees, let our roots connect and breathe life into not only ourselves but our atmospheres and when we are burned we replant and simply grow from it. We don't know when will be the last time we get to ask our loved ones how their day was or are able to hold the door for a family with a baby stroller, wave to the baby then give a parents a warm smile, or when your pets greet you at the door and you have the ability to greet them right back. Experience the time to forgive people you swore you never would, even yourself. Trees don't exist anywhere other than right where they are planted, neither should we; that state of mind is how I define peace.

## Hafsah Asim:

Peace is not only the absence of violence but the attainment of freedom, of wholeness, of hope. Peace is not only found in the day of ceasefire but in the days after, in the days of reflection, respect, and renewal. Peace is not only mental clarity but clarity of the events of the past and the near future. Peace is one of the most cherished ideals of humanity, the concept that we spend our whole lives chasing after, yet experience only in rare, sporadic moments. To live in a state of peace is to live in a world founded on the notions of family, equality, and inclusion. Peace is not just the absence of violence: it is the presence of tranquility, unity, and aspiration for a better future.

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## Carlos Araujo:

Peace is a moment, since after millennia, we humans have not managed to make it long lasting. Peace is the split second where no there are no setbacks, no war, no conflict. Peace is the perfect moment of appreciation for what one has, sees, hears, and touches. Peace is a fleeting state that causes pure bliss and tranquility. Peace is when human rights surpass a textual declaration, and everybody can have their needs satisfied. Peace is when in agreement and disagreement unity persists, and each person can learn, grow, develop, and evolve into what they aspire to be.

# What Peace Means:

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03

## Aram Jung:

Peace is the moment your inner monologue takes a coffee break from arguing. It's choosing empathy over ego, listening before speaking, and offering grace when it's easier to judge. Peace arrives when conflict yields to compromise and understanding replaces insistence. It's like a collective exhale when life is busy. It lives in small acts of kindness, honest dialogue, and the belief that we do better when we work together. So in conclusion, peace is the calmness beneath chaos.



Photo by Jack Picone / The VII Foundation

## Gabrielle Christie:

on peace: a reflection

By Gabrielle

peace.

she exists not for stagnation—  
for still feet stuck in sand.

she is not breath held in chests—  
mouths afraid to speak.

she is not life afraid to live.

peace.

she says she is a table  
laid fresh and crisp  
by 195.

she is wide enough for  
names we were told to forget  
and languages we thought were lost.

peace is not a locked gate  
but a door left open  
waiting for others to come through.

peace.

she sings.

though today, she is quiet.

# What Peace Means:

Voices and  
Perspective  
from the  
Youth Authors

03

## Kera Williams

### Stillness in Structure

Still waters persist without persecution or judgment  
Enacting freedoms of a practical nature diminishes the possibility of drowning;  
The oxygen that floats you to the surface berates incessant molecules  
who object to cultivating a just and effective order;

The molecules are embedded with the same oxygen  
that provides sustenance to the subjects of the seas;  
The vastness of the presence of such incessant compounds is vile;  
Yet, its versatility offers the basis for such deposition-  
Which is bolted along the rapid streams of life;

Revitalizing air greatly envelops the hearts of many  
The concrete hands of order tenderize their hearts;  
The subjects of the seas soak in the pleasure of the provided privileges  
By contending with the beating sun of calculated structure;

The delicate rays reveal an array of glistening folds  
Without measure, crisp and glistening ripples are emblazoned  
Without scholars wishing to pocket their burdens in delight  
The subjects may experience unanointed plight;



Photo by Nicole Tung / The VII Foundation

# Background of Our Project:

Imagine:  
NextGen  
Voices Reflect  
on Peace

04

By Elana Haviv, Ph.D.

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**In the summer of 2021,** I received a copy of the book *Imagine: Reflections on Peace*, created by The VII Foundation. As an educator and scholar focused on genocide and cultures of peace, I found the book extraordinary. It illustrates, through personal stories drawn from investigative journalism, how peace does not instantly manifest after a war has ended. Instead, it can take generations for a society to truly achieve peace.

The VII Foundation writers and photographers returned to the war zones they covered 20 years earlier to investigate the question, "What is peace now?" The project culminated in a book, short films, and an exhibit.

As I read through the stories, one question continually came to mind: What about the young people born in the direct aftermath of these wars? They are the current generation of youth in these countries. Do they carry the legacy of the war? What are their stories?

We dedicated our Generation Human Rights 2021 summer fellowship to what became *Imagine: NextGen Voices Reflect on Peace*. We connected our fellows with their peers in the postwar countries featured in the book and posed the same investigative question: "What is peace now?" We trained our fellows to lead interviews, integrating the use of artifacts and the five senses into their storytelling methodology. All the interviews were done online during the lockdown, and we were amazed at the results.

The interviews were carried out with incredible respect, curiosity, and creativity. We quickly realized that a full curriculum centered on the complexities of peace needed to be developed, with these interviews at its core. It would be a youth-centered and inspired curriculum. I contacted Fiona Turner, The VII Foundation Project Director, and we collaborated to create the full multimedia-based curriculum that includes films created from the interviews. The curriculum is currently being used in classrooms worldwide.

# Background of Our Project:

04

Imagine:  
NextGen  
Voices Reflect  
on Peace

Quote From Our Initial Youth Imagine Interviewer:  
2021 Gen HR Fellow

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## Szymon Jezewski, Poland

*"By listening to stories, fears, and dreams from young people who have lived through the absence of peace and the horrors of conflict, we were trying to understand what peace truly is and what it is not, when it is threatened, and what the conditions are for peace to last. These conversations were difficult, always thought-provoking, and very inspiring. We also had a chance to listen to diverse and uniquely beautiful thoughts on forgiveness, remembrance, justice, freedom, friendship, trust, and hope. Which...I have learned throughout this project, creates the foundation of peace."*

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The Imagine program continues to evolve as GenHR Fellows lead courageous, deeply human dialogues with their peers across both post-conflict and active conflict regions. This issue features excerpts from those conversations, along with interviews and links to our films, offering a window into voices too often unheard.

Our current phase, Imagine: NextGen Voices Reflect on Peace, Classroom to Classroom, brings together paired classrooms from regions shaped by war and those experiencing peace. These youth, who might otherwise have never met, are given the rare opportunity to learn about one another's lives, realities, and hopes. The program creates a shared space where relationships can take root, meaningful conversations can unfold, and creative artistic responses can emerge, responses that confront conflict, imagine resolution, and contribute to the building of sustainable peace.

At a time when division dominates the global landscape, the need to nurture authentic, cross-border connections among young people is both urgent and enduring. We remain unwavering in our commitment to strengthening peace through the transformative power of storytelling.

# The Generation Human Rights & The VII Foundation Partnership

## Elana Haviv, Ph.D.

Generation Human Rights  
Founder & Executive Director

The partnership between Generation Human Rights and the VII Foundation is essential to bringing human rights education to life. Through powerful photography, film, and visual storytelling, the complexities of peace, conflict, and justice become tangible, relatable, and deeply felt by the next generation. As a result, these meaningful connections help equip young people with the empathy, understanding, and confidence to take thoughtful action in their communities and beyond.



## Ron Haviv

The VII Foundation ~ Director

The VII Foundation is committed to journalism that documents the world and ensures it is shared widely, across both traditional and non-traditional platforms. Central to this mission is education—passing on the knowledge and tools needed to understand global events. Through its partnership with Generation Human Rights, this work moves beyond visibility, becoming an active part of how students engage with and interpret the world around them.



# A Generation of Action:

My Time with Generation Human Rights

By Austin Emery

I interned with Generation Human Rights as a facilitator for the 2025 summer Imagine fellows. In my first meeting with the fellows, they were asked to provide their own definitions of peace. Some were formulaic. Some were poetic. All of them were deeply insightful. Guest editing for The Rutgers Humanist is a unique project because it brings fellows from around the world to collaboratively write, with their unique perspectives working in concert. And as they reflected, “peace” is not as one-dimensional as a dictionary would have us believe.

During the early stages of my work with Generation Human Rights, I was staying in Cape Town, South Africa, as part of the Mundt Peace Scholarship. There, I had spoken with asylum seekers who could not file for asylum because their origin countries were not experiencing armed conflict, even though they had faced political persecution. This issue of The Rutgers Humanist has the potential to bring change to issues like this, and that is something our team believes in.

Working with the fellows in breakout rooms, I have seen how they have taken ownership of their ideas. Their passions have carried these articles through a laborious process of research, interviewing, and constant revision. This process has not only sharpened their skills but has also taught all of us about the value of human rights in new ways. I am eager to see how the fellows will use this experience to create change in their communities and countries.

# Experience of Being Heard:

By Greg Ayres

Working with young people in the Imagine project for Generation Human Rights has been such a rewarding experience. The Imagine book and curriculum give us a strong anchor, students know they’re part of something larger, and it gives them a framework to build their own ideas around. From there, they really take off.

One of the most exciting parts is seeing how their interview skills grow. At first, a lot of students are shy about asking questions or worried about “getting it wrong.” But with practice, they start to relax, listen more deeply, and respond in the moment. You can see their confidence grow as they realize they’re not just completing an assignment, they’re actually having meaningful conversations. That shift is powerful.

By the end of the project, students are connecting the dots between their research, their interviews, and their creative responses in ways that are deeply personal. What I love most is watching them take pride in what they’ve made and recognizing that their voices matter. The Imagine project doesn’t just teach them about human rights, it gives them the experience of being heard, of contributing, and of seeing themselves as storytellers and changemakers.

# Imagine: Reflections on Peace

06

## Fiona Turner & Ron Haviv on Documenting Peace After Conflict

By Isabella McAllister

Imagine a world where peace and rehabilitation are priorities after conflict. Or a society that reflects on and acknowledges its violent past to better prevent future occurrences of violence. Thanks to the project *Imagine: Reflections on Peace*, launched in 2018, that world is brought within reach. This initiative includes a book, short films, exhibitions, and a curriculum focused on post-conflict peace education. Ron Haviv, Co-Founder and Director of the VII Foundation, along with Project Director Fiona Turner, were welcomed by Generation Human Rights summer interns and fellows to be interviewed on the creation, process, and impact of the *Imagine* project.

The interview opened with an insightful discussion about the personal backgrounds and formative experiences that inspired and shaped the creators of the *Imagine* project.

Ron Haviv is a visual journalist known for documenting conflict. His work captures history, telling stories that inspire local and global change. His photographs have served as visual evidence to obtain justice, document the devastation of war, and spark movements pushing for social change. He is currently documenting ICE in New York and has recently returned from a trip to D.C., where he documented the deployment of the National Guard. His experience in over 25 countries during times of violence, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina and Haiti, inspired him to found the VII Foundation, an organization

dedicated to documenting and sharing the truth, especially in regions where journalism is at risk. The VII Mentorship Program has successfully trained over 1,200 young journalists from more than 100 countries.

Fiona Turner is the Project Director of VII Foundation Films and has over 20 years of broadcast experience with ABC News and NBC News. She recently completed a film, *The Stringer*, which questions the authenticity and the authorship of the iconic *The Napalm Girl* photograph. Turner's remarkable career as a five-time Emmy Award-winning producer and documentary filmmaker certainly manifests in the *Imagine* project. Fiona directed films such as *Elvis*, which follows the story of one man's survival at a concentration camp created by Serbian forces in northwest Bosnia and his journey to inner peace as a refugee in New Zealand.

Fiona explained that she was able to "set out deadlines, coordinate sending people into the field, get their work back, edit it, and physically put the book together."

The *Imagine* project was initiated because the VII Foundation team noticed that once a conflict has ended and the media shifts its focus to the next attention-grabbing situation, post-war countries are often left to rebuild without any support or peace-making initiatives, such as curriculum programs in schools. This period, when the fire has been put out but can just as

# Imagine: Reflections on Peace

06

## Fiona Turner & Ron Haviv on Documenting Peace After Conflict

easily be relit, is the most crucial time to focus on these countries. Ron Haviv says, "When peace came, quite often the population needed more help and more attention from the world than it actually did during the war itself. Nobody really paid that much attention to it."

Once the purpose of the project was determined, the team selected the countries to document. The VII Foundation chose Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, Colombia, Lebanon, Northern Ireland, and Rwanda to ensure a geographic balance and secure enough time to deeply observe whether or not peace was truly established. A unique aspect of Imagine is that photographers who documented the conflicts years ago returned to those areas for further investigation. Fiona mentioned that they "wanted people [journalists] with personal connections to these regions."

Ron Haviv returned to Bosnia, while Jack Picone went back to Rwanda. The personal connections these photographers have to these regions allowed them to reflect on the changes, both positive and negative, that occurred. For example, Ron determined that Bosnia remained dysfunctional.

Youth are the future. Peace will cease to exist if the younger generations do not have access to an education that teaches them how to foster and sustain it. The VII Foundation partnered with Generation Human Rights to create Imag-

ine: NextGen Voices Reflect on Peace, a youth-centered curriculum project that gives young people, in all areas, whether peaceful or not, the opportunity to end the vicious cycle of violence. In Fiona's words, "Trauma can be carried down through generations, but young people have the power to break that cycle. They can choose to say, "This history will not define me." In Northern Ireland, the Imagine team met with students in the younger generation who no longer care about religious affiliations.

Imagine: Reflections on Peace is more than journalism; it is a manual for future generations who must overcome the seemingly most impossible challenges a society can face, such as genocide. Ron emphasizes that the "project is basically a guidebook for future peacemakers. The value and impact could be tremendous, especially for future diplomats and leaders who can learn lessons from these peace processes." Peace cannot be achieved if it is not believed in. A society cannot change if it does not try to change. Imagine gives communities a chance to find hope, resilience, forgiveness, and the potential for healing, even in the most challenging circumstances.

*"There's no such thing as an unsolvable conflict, only conflicts not yet solved. The first attempt at peace might fail, but if you persist, you will succeed."*

— Fiona Turner

# Svitlo Ukrainian Youth Leadership in the Dark: Amid Interrupted Education

By Carlos Araujo & Sonja Vinh-Thomas

07

Translation by Yelizavieta Shurubor, Ukrainian Translator  
(\*Ukrainian Version)

## Anastasia Panchenko

woke up on February 24, 2022, in Kyiv, Ukraine, to the sound of explosions.

At first, the fourteen-year-old tried to convince herself that life, and school, could continue as usual. "I had my physics exam that day," Anastasia shared in her Imagine: NextGen Voices Reflect on Peace interview. She had studied hard for it and remembers packing her bag for school, thinking, "If it's war, if it's not war, I can't miss it." But within hours, the airports near her home were bombed, and she and her mother were forced to flee, taking only a few belongings and their cat.

For many young people living through war, education is one of the first things to be interrupted. Schools are bombed or turned into shelters, teachers are displaced, and even walking to class can become dangerous. Suddenly, something that once provided normalcy and routine for millions of children becomes inaccessible.

Toby Fricker, Chief of Advocacy and Communications at UNICEF Ukraine, described schools as much more than places for learning. "Schools are lifelines," he said. "They provide safety, normalcy, and hope for the future." Yet, for millions of Ukrainian children, those lifelines have been cut. "Disrupted education has sadly become the norm for children across Ukraine." Almost 40 percent now rely only on online or hybrid learning, sometimes connecting to lessons from basements or underground shelters.



Courtesy of Ron Haviv / The VII Foundation

But the challenges faced by students go far beyond classrooms and buildings. Fricker shared a story of a young girl who wanted nothing more than to graduate with her friends. She lived next to her school, but as the war escalated, her studies were abruptly halted. Just days after her school finally reopened for students to resume classes, another attack destroyed the building. Stories like hers are devastating and have a profound impact on young students: children carry trauma into their school days and fear into what should be a safe space. Many fall years behind in core subjects, and others haven't been in a classroom at all since the start of the war. Still, countless students continue trying, logging on to lessons, keeping up with homework, and holding onto any sense of normalcy possible.

Another young person, Velislava, who is nineteen and part of the Imagine program, shared her story of forced migration to Germany. Initially, she viewed this as an unexpected obstacle due to the abrupt changes in her environment, language, and social context. She encountered communication barriers, adjusted to a new culture, and adapted to an entirely different lifestyle. This

# Svitlo Ukrainian Youth Leadership in the Dark: Amid Interrupted Education

By Carlos Araujo & Sonja Vinh-Thomas

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Translation by Yelizavieta Shurubor, Ukrainian Translator

rupture in learning and social growth is what the international community calls Interrupted Education: the denial or disruption of a child's right to consistent, safe, and accessible schooling due to conflict and displacement. Through Velislava's experience, the hardships and emotional cost of forced migration become evident. Interrupted education means more than just missing lessons; it involves losing the routines, friendships, and sense of stability that school provides. In such tumultuous times, education becomes not only a right but also a critical means of safety.

For Anastasia, that lifeline never completely broke. Over several months, she and her mother traveled from Ukraine to Poland to Germany, crossing borders and sometimes going days without real food or shelter. Through it all, school remained a constant for her. Even as her teachers held online classes from bomb shelters, the continuity of lessons and homework gave her a sense of stability. "Something that I'm familiar with, like school, is going on. It helped my spirit," she said in her GenHR interview.



Courtesy of Ron Haviv / The VII Foundation

By June, Anastasia had secured a visa and arrived in New York City, completely alone at just fifteen years old. "It was like starting from scratch again, but this time, there's no Mama." After reaching out to ten people through Shelter for Ukraine, one young woman finally responded, offering her a shared room in an apartment. Through that connection, Anastasia found a local high school in Brooklyn where she was able to enroll, finally resuming her education and rebuilding a sense of stability and routine.

Today, she dreams of one day returning to Ukraine to support young people, especially in education. Her story reflects a global call to raise awareness and to honor those who continue leading through the war in Ukraine.

The power of youth is a treasure for the entire world. Across struggles and conflicts, young leaders spark the light of change. In Ukraine, even amid the war and the absence of safety, young people have refused to let education disappear. They have stepped in to protect what should already be accessible: the right to learn.

# Svitlo Ukrainian Youth Leadership Amid Interrupted Education

## in the Dark: By Carlos Araujo & Sonja Vinh-Thomas

Translation by Yelizavieta Shurubor, Ukrainian Translator

Svitlo School, which translates to the “light school,” embodies that spirit by radiating light amidst these dark times. The school’s founder, Yuliya Kosko, a Ukrainian education expert living in the United Kingdom, began by organizing a few English lessons for children in Zaporizhzhye on March 14th, 2022. Now, more than 2,500 Ukrainian students aged 10-18 and a team of over 60 volunteer teachers and helpers make up an online community of learning (English Language School Charity for Ukrainian Children, n.d.).

Several other Ukrainian youth leaders have also emerged to demonstrate that everyone can take part in aiding fellow Ukrainians, especially in the education field. Sofia Aleynikova, at just fourteen years of age, founded Teenagers Can Act Too, a social project offering online charity projects, master classes, and short-term courses. Young volunteers and leaders in the program host various interactive activities to raise funds to support charitable foundations. The organization also gathers to weave camouflage nets for Ukrainian defenders. Sofia’s initiative demonstrates that no one is too young to make a change - anyone can create social and educational impact.

In times like these, Ukraine’s youth shine with their svitlo - their light - to defend and reclaim what has always been rightfully theirs, and everyone’s: the right to learn, to grow, and to dream. Leaders like Yuliya and Sofia are proof that, despite adversity and war, young people can build light strong enough to guide an entire generation forward.



Courtesy of Ron Haviv / The VII Foundation



Illustration & Description by María Paula Barrantes

*Interrupted Education Illustration: The large pencil lifted by many hands symbolizes education as a lifeline, upheld by collective support from teachers, volunteers, and communities. The students on the pencil represent different stages of learning and resilience: from a child with a backpack to a graduate holding a diploma, a young leader raising the Ukrainian flag, and a student studying online. Their unity embodies the perseverance and adaptability of Ukrainian youth who continue to learn despite displacement and war. The blue and yellow tones and the flag evoke national pride, while the notebook paper background reinforces the idea of education as both structure and hope in uncertain times.*

# Where is my Home?

08

By Zarafshan Hussaini

My name is Zarafshan Hussaini, an Afghan girl, born and raised in Afghanistan. Currently, I am pursuing a master's degree in Human Rights and International Law in Indonesia, but my heart remains deeply tied to the stories of people from my homeland. Like millions of Afghans, my relatives left Afghanistan during years of war, instability, and poverty, seeking safety and a better life. I have listened to them describe the pain of being treated like outsiders called "dirty," banned from parks, bakeries, and schools, living in fear, and knowing they were never truly welcome. Some Afghan youths have even been killed. These are indicators of a larger injustice rather than merely isolated occurrences.

I did not grow up in Iran, but many of my friends and relatives did, and recently they were deported. They returned to Afghanistan with nothing, no documents, no belongings, no support. Most were from low-income families who had gone to Iran simply to work hard and build a better life. Instead, they were met with discrimination, violence, and forced removal.

I chose this story because I want to reflect their voices, the pain, the strength, and the truth of what it means to be Afghan and displaced. The title of this article, "Where is my Home?" reflects the emotional state of many who feel lost between two countries neither of which offers them safety, dignity, and belonging.

This essay aims to demonstrate to readers how human rights are challenged in everyday life,

not just in laws and rules, but also in the daily struggles people face to stay alive. I want readers to understand how much conflict and discrimination affect the lives of those displaced, and feel empathy toward displaced people. This story serves as a poignant reminder of our shared humanity, urging us to care and act with compassion.

To understand this struggle more closely, I spoke with Sama, a 30-year-old Afghan woman who spent most of her life in Iran. Her words still echo in me:

My name is Sama, and I am 30 years old. Iran has been my home since childhood—I spent more than twenty years of my life there. My mornings always began before sunrise, preparing breakfast for my husband and our two little girls. After dropping them at a private school in the city, I joined my husband in the factory fields, harvesting fruits and vegetables under the hot sun.

Life was simple, yet steady. In the afternoons, I sometimes gathered with my neighbors, sharing tea and food while our children played freely in the dusty streets. I was married in Iran, built a family there, and watched my husband work tirelessly for a better future. Over the years, I learned the rhythms of Iranian culture, its history, its traditions, until the streets and people felt familiar. Friends became like family, and at times I even felt as if I truly belonged.

What I cherished most was the simple happiness of being with my family. Having steady work and watching my two daughters attend

# Where is my Home?

08

By Zarafshan Hussaini

school filled me with hope. Their education was our greatest treasure, the reason my husband and I worked so hard every single day. With our temporary residence permit in hand, I sometimes even forgot that I was a migrant. We lived in a small, aging house on the edge of the city, surrounded by other Afghan families. Together, we created a warm, welcoming community that felt like home. For years, I allowed myself to believe that we belonged.

Then came the night that shattered everything. I still remember it vividly—an unexpected knock at our door, and a stern official standing there. His words struck like lightning: our documents were no longer valid, and our stay in Iran was now “illegal.” My body froze; my heart pounded in my chest. It felt as though the ground had been pulled from beneath me, as though the life we had built with such effort was collapsing in a single breath.

At first, I told myself it must be a mistake, maybe just a threat. But when the official letter arrived warning that we would be arrested if we stayed, I knew there was no more room for hope. I stood caught between disbelief and despair, not ready to let go of the life we had built.

We were given only two weeks to leave Iran. Two weeks to erase twenty-three years of life. There was no time to collect our belongings, no time to reclaim the money we had given the landlord, not even time to properly say goodbye to friends and relatives who had become part of my soul. What cut deepest was my daughters’ education. I had dreamed of them finishing school, of holding books instead of

burdens. Knowing that in Afghanistan this chance would vanish broke me in ways I still cannot describe. As a mother, letting go of that dream was like tearing away a piece of my heart.

The journey back to Afghanistan was nothing short of a nightmare. We were herded into a crowded camp, where we spent five long days under suffocating heat. There was little food, almost no clean water, and no dignity. The Iranian officers hurled insults, accused us absurdly of fighting for Israel, and I watched in horror as they beat some of the deportees. Others were forced to hand over large sums of money just to be transported. In those days, I learned how quickly respect and compassion can vanish—how easily human dignity can be stripped away until you feel less than human.

The last time I had seen Afghanistan I was a child. My memories were blurred fragments of faces, fragments of streets but nothing I could hold onto. When we crossed the border at Islam Qala, the crowd swallowed us. I stood there feeling like a stranger in the very land that was supposed to be mine. Everything was unfamiliar, yet it was called my “home.” When we reached Kabul, my husband’s uncle welcomed us into his house. In that moment of exhaustion and despair, his kindness felt like a lifeline. His warm hospitality reminded me that even in the hardest times, humanity still lives in small gestures.

Now, we are renting a small house on the edge of the city. We had to begin life from nothing—no furniture, no savings, no belongings carried

# Where is my Home?

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By Zarafshan Hussaini

over from Iran. And yet, when I hear the word *home*, I know it is not just walls or furniture. Home is a feeling. It is safety, belonging, and the fragile hope of peace. That is what I am still searching for, here, in the place that is my homeland.

Sama's journey is just one thread in a much larger story. Every deportee carries a different story, a different memory of what was lost. After hearing Sama, I met Mohammad, a 27 year old Afghan boy who had worked in Iran for five years. His journey revealed another face of displacement:

My name is Mohammad. I left Afghanistan five years ago for Iran, hoping to secure a better future for my family. Each day began with twelve long hours at construction sites. Life in Iran felt strange and heavy, but I worked tirelessly to provide for my loved ones. Those exhausting shifts gave me both a sense of purpose and a reminder of how fragile our lives as migrants could be. Even a single hour of rest during the day felt like a treasure.

I lived apart from my family because my workplace was far from the city. I shared a small room with other Afghan laborers who worked in the same construction company. The space was cramped, but in our late-night conversations and shared meals, we found comfort. Together, we carried our struggles, our hopes, and the fleeting moments of joy that made each day a little more bearable.

But work was not the whole of my life. There were rare moments that reminded me of joy. Weekends brought me the most joy. Those

were the rare moments when I could join my family and friends in the city. Sharing food, talking for hours, laughing together, and simply being outside gave me new energy. Being with my family reminded me that I was not alone, that even in hardship, there was still warmth and love.

But for an Afghan boy like me, life in Iran was never easy. Each day came with sharp reminders that we didn't truly belong. On the streets, in shops, even among neighbors, we often faced harsh words and cold stares. That constant suspicion was painful, humiliating, and heavy to carry. Slowly, the hopes that had brought me to Iran began to fade, as if the future I had dreamed of was slipping further away.

One early morning, I was still lying in bed with the other workers when two police officers suddenly burst into our room. There was no warning, no explanation. I showed them my valid passport, but they ignored it. Within minutes, we were shoved into their car—still in our pajamas, pockets empty, slippers on our feet. We weren't allowed to call our families, change clothes, or gather even a little money. All I felt was a rush of fear and helplessness as if the ground had vanished beneath me. That morning was the end of my life in Iran and the beginning of a cruel journey home.

The journey to the border was brutal. Days and nights blurred together inside overcrowded camps, where we sat hungry, thirsty, and burning under the harsh sun. Even with valid documents in hand, the Iranian soldiers treated us

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with cruelty. They shouted, humiliated, and beat people, demanding large sums of money—to let us pass. In those moments, it felt as though dignity itself had been stripped away. We were left with nothing but fear and despair.

Crossing the border, I realized how much had changed in just five years. Men looked different now—most wore long clothes and full beards. A crowd had gathered, waiting to welcome the deportees. From there, the road carried me to Kabul. When I finally reached, I went straight to my relatives' home. After the long and exhausting journey, their warm welcome gave me a moment of comfort. Still, my heart was restless, weighed down by worry for my family left behind in Iran.

Now, when I hear the word home, I think of two places at once—my family in Iran, and myself here in Afghanistan. And yet, I truly belong to neither. For now, I live in a guesthouse, carrying hope like a fragile candle, waiting for the day life might feel whole again.

The stories of Sama and Mohammad reflect the experiences of countless others who have faced displacement. Their journeys show us that being displaced is not just about leaving a place; it is about losing a sense of belonging, facing challenges, seeking connection and safety. Through their experiences, we learn that home is more than a building; it is peace, security, and a feeling of belonging. Even when everything is taken away, the dignity, resilience, and hope they carry make home something that lives in their hearts.

For me, the idea of home exists in two parts. On the one hand, it is external—the city where I was born, the house where my parents lived, the streets where I spent my childhood. On the other hand, it is internal—a feeling of comfort, safety, and belonging, carried in the warmth of cooking with my mother in the kitchen or sitting at the dinner table sharing a meal with my family. These two sides cannot exist separately: a physical house without love and belonging is only a structure, while a sense of home without a place remains only a longing.

That is why, despite living now in Indonesia, my true home will always be Afghanistan. It is both the land where I grew up and the place where my memories, feelings, and sense of belonging remain alive within me. Together, they remind me that home is both a place and a feeling—inseparable and everlasting.

# Displacement, Detention, & Deportation:

IMAGINE Being as a Birthright

By Jazmin Tamez

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Courtesy of Ron Haviv / The VII Foundation

## Fractured Peace, A Nation Unravelling

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I witness peace as it unravels, a forced comprehension as those I live alongside and have grown up with are 'othered' and targeted.

I observe day by day as classmates who pursue an education rather than immediately working, suddenly drop out of high school – futures stolen. I hear stories slip into conversation as my mother, a teacher, recounts how her students, as young as sixth grade, disappear from class. I watch the disruption of lives and livelihoods, voiced by a parent with somber clarity that “this is our life, we don’t have the opportunity to study.” Initially, I didn’t understand the full extent of the fear that others felt that drove them to pull their children from school, miss doctors’ appointments, and forgo work in anticipation of raids. Many hold contingency plans with their children if their father or mother is taken. Yet, as weeks went by, I began to feel the impact upon my community – not just see it – but experience the stigma firsthand.

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More members of my family have become stuck on the other side of the Texas-Mexico border, just minutes from where I live, separated by steel that is supposed to protect me. Overwhelming flashing news headlines replace childhood novellas at family gatherings, transforming celebrations into somber occasions. My heart breaks at the picture painted of the people who I resemble – reduced to a ‘problem’ that needs to be taken care of. Different colors, cultures, and histories should not warrant the prejudice and violence that afflict migrant communities.

## Becoming ‘Others’: The Crises of Apathy

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I was raised by a migrant mother who has struggled and scraped by her whole life, from laboring in the fields as a ten-year-old to retaking high school twice due to language barriers. My mother recounted these stories of her difficulties in both Mexico and America, which made her my hero. However, it was the same stories that caused her to be villainized by the world. Migrants are criminalized and viewed as a mass threat, while immigrants are viewed as legal violators. Today, both groups are categorized as criminalized categories created to dehumanize and ‘other’ individuals based on the assumption of illegality.

Immigrants and migrants are having their personhood stripped away, becoming sub-human in the eyes of the American public they once lived and worked alongside. They are indispensable to the societies that continuously disparage them. Red targets are figuratively painted on the backs of individuals who have sought a better future, chasing dreams in a country that now refuses to accept them.

There is now a consensus that it is acceptable to enact violence, in any form of stripping choices, freedoms, and dignity, against immigrant and migrant bodies. The violence is justified by labels such as “illegal,” “alien,” and “criminal.” In a personal conversation with immigration attorney Allegra Love, she commented that the “American public is satisfied with the explanation that someone who comes into this country is wrong and has subjected them to heinous punishment, but can’t even describe what they’ve done.”

Illegality is not an identity, but has become a form of condemnation. Regardless of citizenship status, the appearance, accent, or occupation of immigrant and migrant communities leads to their othering - stereotyping, targeting, and criminalization.

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What was once a conscious and unified country has fragmented, tightening control over its diverse communities, and fostering apathy and violence toward those deemed "unbelonging." The call for mass deportations and a zero-tolerance immigration policy have led to a rise in immigration detention and a rollback of immigrant rights.

On September 8, 2025, *The New York Times* reported that the Supreme Court temporarily lifted a federal judge's order that prohibited certain immigration enforcement tactics, namely barring immigration stops based solely on a person's apparent race or ethnicity, language, occupation, or location. This precedent exacerbates the dehumanization of anyone who fits these descriptions, leading to racial profiling and othering. There is a staggering erosion of human rights and peace within the U.S., marginalizing and targeting individuals to meet a quota. Peace hangs by a thread that is being picked at and unravelling.

Today, the hands of those who bear signs of a hard life are ripped from one another, struggling to hold on to the life they'd built by those hands and to the people they call family – by blood or community. Yet, the cacophony of voices continues to be ignored, with injustices ongoing – such as people being forcibly taken into unmarked vehicles, ripped from their children, and arrested in their own homes.



Courtesy of Ron Haviv / The VII Foundation

# Displacement, Detention, & Deportation:

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## Displaced Futures – Detained and Dehumanized

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Caged and packed in like animals, detention centers epitomize the denial and violation of human rights. In these facilities, basic necessities are often denied, and the dignity of those detained is eroded. Widely documented, the inhumane conditions resulting from the prioritization of security over humane treatment result in overcrowding, poor living conditions, lack of medical care, psychological trauma, and legal violations.

Many stories illustrate this harsh reality. Rafael and Kimberle Martinez recounted their stay in one facility as being, "... caged up like animals, and ... laugh[ed] at." At another facility, detainees mentioned, "We felt like we were in a cage," and being "treat[ed] like animals solely for being an immigrant." A man detained for 63 days, but never accused of any crime stated, "We want to be in the United States... from the bottom of my heart, I tell you... the guards treat you like garbage... you feel like your life is over." The various stories and statements shared portray lives marked by cruelty, individuals stripped of their humanity and dignity and subjected to inhumane treatment. Individuals who have spoken out collectively illustrate how their present lives have been devastated and their futures remain unclear.

However stark the situation, there is hope. There is an uproar surrounding the deprivation of human liberties, with both professional and public outcries regarding the inhuman treatment. Attorney General Letitia James commented on, "The abhorrent treatment of immigrants...in horrendous conditions for days in unfit and unsafe facilities." Senior Staff Attorney Eunice Cho at the ACLU's National Prison Project, called such systematic degradation and dehumanization "illegal." While actions have been taken to address this issue, much more must be done to fully address these human rights violations.

# Displacement, Detention, & Deportation:

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## Imagining Hope

Despite these hardships, my community is not without hope. Though our sense of peace is tenuous, it remains in place for those who seek it. Today, various individuals and organizations strive to repair the current systems of detention and deportation, as well as redefine U.S. immigration policy to rebuild our nation's peace (see below). I have hope that many more will continue, not simply professionals, but also the public who have stood in solidarity and raised their voices in protest. The most essential efforts remain not only in impact litigation and lobbying for reform, challenging these policies, but also in the public who continuously march for their fellow human beings, who fear the erosion of human rights, and who recognize the need for dissent and disobedience.

I still drive past the Texas-Mexico border, watching the desolate area in despair, knowing by heart the stories written about it, knowing by blood the calling to the family on the other side of it. I know our fight requires us to be patient, but too often the consequences of disempowerment and dehumanization endure for generations.

# Speaking with Reality:

## What Interviewing Mohamed Malik Taught Me About the Conflicts of Today

By Selena Said

My name is Selena, and I am a high school senior in Washington, D.C., making me a junior at the time of the interview, planning to study International Relations, Human Rights, and Economics in college. Before my work with Generation Human Rights as a 2025 summer fellow, I began as an intern the previous semester, working on the Imagine: NextGen Voices Reflect on Peace curriculum. Growing up in Lebanon, I witnessed the limited attention the refugees received from the public and various institutions that should be helping them. This experience sparked my passion for human rights and led me to invest my time in learning about refugees and addressing inequalities around the world.

“In my eyes, or the way I see it, peace is when things are quiet because there is no noise, not awkwardly quiet.” This is what Mohamed shared when my partner Faith and I asked him how he defines peace. Peace: a utopian word considering the state of the world today, a complex goal for all fighters and activists, including myself, yet explained as if it were an observation, a state of being, an individual-level sensation. And while that is one of its technical definitions, I come to understand that he emphasizes how peace of any kind starts with each person’s ability to connect with their surroundings, cherish their memories, and feel comfortable. According to Mohamed, it is only through the silence away from the chaos caused by the brutal realities of human rights abuses that this is possible.

Mohamed Malek is a current university student in Canada who fled Sudan with his siblings due to the devastation of the unrest. Faith and I had the opportunity to interview Mohamed on March 4, 2025, to hear how his experiences living in and leaving a war zone could help learn, spread awareness, and encourage discussion on the brutal realities plaguing today’s world, and how anyone, even youth, can address such conflicts.

One of my biggest takeaways from the interview was how unsuccessful the media, reports, second-hand accounts, etc, are in sharing the real stories, despite efforts to ensure proper coverage. Hearing from Mohamed taught me more about the impact of war and human rights abuses than I learned from any source I ingested over the past years. Through the approach that the Imagine project takes, the curriculum will provide educators and learners the ability to learn about these realities from the source or individuals experiencing them. With various factors impacting the accuracy of traditional media, such as political bias, Imagine highlights the stories that need to be heard by everyone for a proper difference to be made.

# Speaking with Reality:

## What Interviewing Mohamed Malik Taught Me About the Conflicts of Today

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In preparation for the interview, we followed the GenHR Imagine interview framework, and we asked Mohamed to bring in artifacts: one that represents family, one that symbolizes peace, and one that encapsulates his journey. Artifacts are any objects the interviewee chooses to help share their story, which they have a personal connection to. Using personal artifacts chosen by the interviewees as a focal point for storytelling helps the interviewee feel grounded and in control of the moment. The interviewees involved in the Imagine project may have experienced traumatizing events, and we want to ensure that they feel as comfortable as possible. Through the use of artifacts to share personal stories, all the pain, suffering, and excruciating circumstances described in mainstream media outlets felt infinitely more real, as if I were a passenger on his journey. Then, I realized that any pain I felt was nothing compared to that of Mohamed's.

While there are several stories and moments Mohamed shared with us, there were three that really stood out. The first one was about how he kept with him the Sudanese flag his uncle was wearing when he was shot while protesting. Even now, the flag is still not completely clean from the blood. "I thought it would be a good symbolism for the fact that it hasn't been that clean in terms of peace in Sudan," he said.

In the next story, he shared a letter his mom gave him before he and his siblings left for Canada. At the time of the interview, his mom was in Nairobi, Kenya, having also left Sudan. To him, this is the last official connection he had with his mother, which was around two years before the interview was conducted. Mohamed underscored how much his family meant to him, and yet they were forced to be separated, showing how the conflict was infiltrating every part of his life. It was creating noise in every possible way.

Finally, the last story was in connection to photos he had of himself back in Sudan, visually encapsulating how vastly his life changed in a few years. He explained how these photos, hung on his wall, were the last he took at his school while he still lived in Sudan back in 2022. At the time, he was a senior in high school, wearing his varsity jacket in the photos, and expecting to graduate. "So, I didn't get to graduate [high school], and I had to leave the [varsity] jacket at home. I couldn't bring it with me. So, I guess this shows my journey, and it shows how the pictures were back in Sudan, and how they are now, how much I've changed physically, and I guess in the way that I smile when I look [at] the pictures."

It is after these stories that I truly learned what resilience and strength meant. Mohamed had experienced immensely traumatic moments dealing with images of physical and emotional

# Speaking with Reality:

## What Interviewing Mohamed Malik Taught Me About the Conflicts of Today

torture, and yet he was still able and willing to describe these scenes. And while he seemed to have grown to adapt to such trauma and pain, he implicitly highlights that the lessons and experiences will always be a part of him.

"I am way more appreciative now of a lot of things. I don't think I could be in a scenario where I dread it so much, as much as back when I was dreading the whole Sudan situation. There is nothing that measures up to that, whether it's the fear that you have, the uneasiness, or the worry that you're always engulfed in. It doesn't get worse than that. So I'm just way more grateful. I became way, way more positive in terms of future thinking, the way I see the future."



Photo courtesy of Mohammed Malik

Hence, his perseverance was not only showcased through his ability to share his stories, but also by the fact that he could develop a new mindset to approaching life, knowing, first-hand, that it can get ugly. It is something I truly admire about Mohamed, as I feel that, especially after listening to him, I cannot come to terms with it. Deep down, I think the reason is that, as someone never exposed to such horrifying occurrences, I can't believe it is true, and I don't want to accept that it is possible. Yet, the more I heard from Mohamed and other first-hand perspectives, the more I know that I, and everyone else, need to accept the modern world for a difference to be made.

In the end, the final thing I learned is the importance of listening. Throughout the interview, I listened, which granted me the power to take Mohamed's words to heart and the passion to strive to achieve his peace. Just as this piece started, it ends with the rest of Mohamed's definition of peace, so that you can listen too: "That quiet, not silence, is what I define to be peace: when I have[,] not really a normal life, but a life where I have the freedom to do what I want when I want it. That is what I kind of consider to be peace."

# Imagine the Colors of Peace

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By Aram Jung, Swara Gowdra, Hafsa Asim

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When people talk about peace, it's often reduced to the "absence of violence." In official documents and diplomatic speeches, that definition seems sufficient - it's neat and measured in a way most people can comprehend. But can one really measure the extent of what peace means to an individual, whose experiences and emotions are entirely unique to them? When humans go through routine systemic oppression and injustice, in a world where stability is not a conceivable concept, peace becomes less of a rationale and more of a feeling.

Color, in contrast, offers a universal yet deeply personal language that transcends man-made borders, ideologies, and divisions. It can speak to us in ways that words sometimes can't. Children express their joy through the colors they choose to draw with. Educators decorate their classrooms with warm and bright colors to signal a sense of belonging to their students. Families light candles or wear certain colors to honor traditions. Across cultures, color ties us together and helps express ourselves in ways that carry the weight of our emotions, histories, and dreams. By using color as a lens to view peace, people can move beyond institutionalized definitions and focus on the lived, human reality of it.

For those emerging from war, their colors of peace are often shaped by the contrasts they have witnessed: the soft reds of a woven blanket offered by a neighbor, the bright orange of a child's backpack on their first day of school in a new country, a clear blue sky finally visible after the dust had settled - these are all experiences that mold who a person is, and in turn, shift their view of peace.

To understand how people from different backgrounds define and experience peace, our group conducted personal interviews with Serena and Mohamed, individuals whose lives have been directly affected by conflict and displacement. We used an open-ended approach, allowing them to describe peace in their own words and connect it to colors that best capture their experiences. By centering their voices rather than imposing a strict definition, we were able to highlight peace as something both deeply personal and entirely unique to each person. The methodology combined narrative storytelling with symbolic interpretations of color, bridging experiences with tranquility.

# Imagine the Colors of Peace

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Serena

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August 4, 2020, at 6:07 pm, is a moment forever etched in the memories of those who witnessed the largest non-nuclear blast in modern history - the Beirut port explosion.

Barely a teen at the time, Serena Kaissi recalls her building shaking “side to side, really, really aggressively, really violently” as the port of her hometown detonated. Instinctively, she grabbed her passport and her cats and, with her mother, fled in confusion, uninformed as to whether another blast was imminent. As she looked out onto the street, Serena saw the horrifying aftermath, describing how people tried to piece together human remains in the streets, struggling to make sense of whose lives had been violently ended. For her, the explosion did not only represent destruction but also the absence of clarity.

*“You could argue that since the port explosion happened, everything else started to fall too. This was considered to me and most Lebanese as a core memory for when everything started to go downhill in Lebanon.”*

For Serena, her understanding of peace evolved after this harrowing experience. Before the events of August 2020, her childhood in Lebanon was a time when children could be care-free, adults were not consumed with financial struggles, and the people had trust in their government.

*“I would say there’s no peace shown in the video, other than people continuing to live after that happened, acting like it never happened,” she said. “It gave us patience and discipline. To me, peace is not to harm, not to kill—and it has to have clarity. Without clarity, there is no peace.”*

To her, peace, in essence, is the attainment of clarity and not only the absence of violence. The lack of answers from Lebanon’s leaders about the explosion remains a wound, but the unity she found among neighbors offered another kind of clarity—the clarity of shared humanity. For Serena, that day marked not only devastation but also a collective rebirth.

*“After August 4, the Lebanese people just came together. No matter what religion you were, what sect you were from, that did not matter, because that day marked our unity,”*

# Imagine the Colors of Peace

When asked about how she experiences peace through the medium of color, Serena chose white and green. "White resembles rebirth, purity, and clarity," she said, "and green represents growth within yourself and in your community." Her choice reflects not only the rebuilding of Beirut after destruction but also her personal growth.

Serena's story reminds us that there is not one definition of peace. It is lived, lost, and reimagined in the aftermath of violence. Through her lens, peace is the ability to have answers for the trauma you have experienced, the safety to live a life of normalcy, and the deep bond of community that the people of Lebanon formed.

## Mohamed

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For Mohamed Malik, Sudan will always feel like home. He spent 19 years there, growing up in a community where life revolved around shared moments - gatherings by the Nile River, barbecues with family friends, afternoons spent playing basketball before sitting down to a meal cooked by a friend's mother. "My friend's mom viewed me as her son," Mohamed said, remembering how easily neighbors became family. This culture of generosity and connection shaped his sense of belonging and continues to shape his memories of Sudan.

*"In my eyes, if Sudan right now was conflict-free, I would be there and I would view it as a peaceful place."*

That closeness, however, is paired with loss. Mohamed left Sudan because of the conflict that has shadowed the country for years. Though Canada now offers him safety, he carries the longing and ache of being separated from his people. "In my eyes, if Sudan right now was conflict-free, I would be there," he admitted. For him, peace is inseparable from Sudan's soil, its history, and the resilience of its communities. He still calls home often, though internet cuts and instability make contact difficult. What he hears - stories of corruption, of people struggling to survive - deepens his determination to keep Sudan alive in the minds of others around him.

For Mohamed, his view of peace is unmistakably linked to the Sudanese flag: the colors of green and white. Green, he explained, carries the memory of Sudan's fertile land and the promise of agriculture. He recalled a national project designed to boost the country's economy, and the hope for potential growth through agriculture made green a color of resilience and renewal. Alongside it, he described that white symbolizes harmony and purity, connecting to the values of Sudan's flags as well.

# Imagine the Colors of Peace

*"I feel like my views of peace are very much tied to the flag, because (in Sudan) we were educated about the flag and what every color resembles."*

In Canada, Mohamed has turned his longing into advocacy. He shares stories about Sudan's culture and history, determined to show that his country is more than conflict headlines. "Most people just view Sudan as a place of conflict, and I don't see it as that," he explained. "It has a very rich culture and a very rich history too." By talking about Sudan's generosity, its traditions, and its community spirit, he resists the flattening of his homeland into a single narrative of war.

To understand how people from different backgrounds define and experience peace, our group conducted personal interviews with Serena and Mohamed, individuals whose lives have been directly affected by conflict and displacement. We used an open-ended approach, allowing them to describe peace in their own words and connect it to colors that best capture their experiences. By centering their voices rather than imposing a strict definition, we were able to highlight peace as something both deeply personal and truly distinctive to each person. The methodology combined narrative storytelling with symbolic interpretations of color, bridging experiences with tranquility.

The stories of Serena and Mohamed reveal that peace cannot be confined to treaties or political agreements, but rather, it lives in our memory, culture, and human connection. Through the spectrum of colors, we see how peace is not an institutionalized definition, but a lived experience - emerging in the aftermath of destruction, in the longing for home, and in the unbreakable bonds of community. What unites these stories is the understanding that peace cannot be reduced to just the absence of violence; it means something entirely unique and unrepeatable to the eight billion people living on this planet. Just as color gives depth to the world around us, it also gives depth to the meaning of peace, reminding us that its true form is not found in unity, but in the vibrant spectrum of human experience.



Photo by Mohamed Malik

# Imagine the Colors of Peace

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## Voices of Peace

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*"Peace means people engaging with each other in a calm manner. This may mean friendly discussions and no war. It means communicating with people without raising their voices or coming to agreements that benefit all parties."*

*~ Nora Pelaka ~*

*"Peace, to me, means having no stress, having full clarity in terms of not worrying if something's going to happen to you or something's going to happen to your loved ones. Peace would be a life without harm, without violence, without pressure. Peace is being unified"*

*~ Serena from England ~*



*"Peace means valuing others' perspectives as you would your own, and focusing on areas of shared harmony rather than deep divides that fuel conflict. At the center of peace lies a mutual understanding: while you may not agree with others or their beliefs, their perspectives should still be consulted and treated with respect."*

*~ Ariana Javid ~*

*"Peace is being able to live free without judgment or worry."*

*~ Emily Lopez ~*



*"For me, peace is the absence of conflict."*

*~ Mohamed from Canada ~*



*"Peace is one of the most cherished ideals of humanity, the concept that we spend our whole lives chasing after, yet experience only in rare, sporadic moments."*

*~ Hasfah from England ~*



# the Language of Peace is Art

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By Gabrielle Christie and Savanna Giddens

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**Art:** the expression of creativity through skill and imagination, particularly through media like visual works, music, literature, and dance. To us, Gabrielle and Savanna, art is one of the most valuable forms of resistance, especially in the face of injustice and oppression. It allows creators like us to reclaim/control narratives and our true feelings in unfiltered and raw ways.

At a time when global headlines are dominated by war, displacement, and division, art offers intimate responses and comprehension of these events. I, Gabrielle, a high school student in the US state of Georgia, have spent so much time in the past two years writing and revising to understand myself and the world around me, and it is moving far too fast. I write because when I put my pen to paper, the waves calm, and my anger, sadness, and longing have purpose. Words transform into friends that would walk across the oldest bridge to bring me clarity.

Art has always been how I, Savanna, a high school student in the US state of Georgia, navigate understanding the world surrounding me. Sketching, painting, or writing for me is a way to communicate feelings that are too big to express in words, and to hold space for hope. Creating is more than just an outlet for me... It's a way to resist, assert agency, and connect with other people. No matter what else is happening, art is how I can find beauty and empathy, and take stock of resilience.

The selected works presented in this piece reflect a diverse range of forms and perspectives that address the complexities of conflict, resilience, and peace. Gab Mejia's "The Passage of Storms from the Philippines"; "Peace Without Limits" by Shuwen Wang, collaboratively created in Dalian, China; the collaborative musical composition "Peace3" by Stoney Creation, Jada Imani, and Maleik Dion; David Gordon's "Peace Child: The Musical"; and Plestia Alaqad's poem "Only in Gaza" were each born out of individual experience and creative expression. At the same time these works are deeply political and uneasy concerning issues of violence, displacement, and hope. We've chosen works from multiple mediums to amplify more youth voices. Artistic interpretation comes in more than one form and resistance is present in every space.

# the Language of Peace is Art

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By Gabrielle Christie and Savanna Giddens

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Together, the works survive the many contingencies of trauma, reflect on dominant narratives, create a potential for reflection, and create a connection of empathy across borders. Moreover, they remind us that peace cannot simply be taken to mean the absence of war, but instead requires the presence of safety, dignity, and hope for a future. They also reflect how art helps us to process trauma, to wrestle with narratives, to create space, to have hope, and to empathize with ourselves and others. They illustrate that peace is not just the absence of conflict, but the presence of safety, of dignity, of hope.

Our generation is coming of age in a time when peace often feels tenuous and unfamiliar. However, through art, we are finding our own ways to imagine a future not structured by fear, but by shared accountability and human empathy. Art articulates experiences of communication that go beyond language. It depicts feelings, empty spaces in community, and the exhilaration of being alive in a completely singular way. This mode of expression is immediate and tangible. It is also accessible to people of all ages. These works of imagination add complexity to our thinking of what peace looks like and who has the authority to define peace. They remind us that peace needs to be active, intentional, and justice-based in the context of conflict. They say that injustice is not as removed from us as it has historically been. Most importantly, these works tell us that it takes active effort to shine the light of peace wherever we can.

# the Language of Peace is Art

By Gabrielle Christie and Savanna Giddens

## Writing for Peace

<https://youtu.be/PPC2RxfF5kE?si=4JoS81peX8Vw2EHF>

### “Only in Gaza”

Poem by Plestia Alaqad, age 23

Only in Gaza you sleep counting rockets  
Rather than stars  
You wake up  
If you woke up  
On the sounds of bombs  
Rather than birds.  
Only in Gaza  
You sleep not knowing  
If you will wake up  
Or how you will wake up.  
In Gaza you sleep in your house  
And you wake up under rubble.  
In Gaza you sleep with your whole body parts—  
You wake up missing a hand or a leg.  
In Gaza you have family and friends.  
The next day you are on your own.  
Only in Gaza people celebrate birthdays  
While bombs echo in the background.  
People welcome you with warm hands  
And a cup of tea while in a tent.  
Only in Gaza despite the pain, people remain,  
Not only survivors, but warriors.



### Plestia Alaqad Biography

Plestia Alaqad (23) is a Palestinian poet, journalist, and activist who uses her words to cross continents to inspire justice and home. Alaqad first became prominent in the public eye after taking to social media to show the effects of the Israeli invasion in Gaza. She began writing poetry in middle school as a method of understanding her surroundings. She first performed her piece ‘Only in Gaza’ at the Bankston Poetry Slam in Australia. Alaqad’s work in journalism and poetry remains an inspiration to youth around the world.

# the Language of Peace is Art

By Gabrielle Christie and Savanna Giddens

## Writing for Peace

### Commentary by Gabrielle Christie

"Only in Gaza," captures the brutal paradox of life under bombardment. Alaqad juxtaposes ordinary moments of innocence with the constant threat of violence. She turns peaceful rituals into acts of survival with lines like, "Only in Gaza, you sleep counting rockets rather than stars" and "people celebrate birthdays while bombs echo in the background." These images are piercing because they force us to imagine the rituals that we take for granted. We never imagine that the stars we see in the sky could one day be rockets marked for our death. We never imagine that we can go to sleep whole and wake up missing a limb that has been with us since before we were born. This piece is especially harrowing because it forces us to realize our privilege.

This piece is so powerful because Plestia refuses to settle into defiance or despair. Instead, she honors the strength of being present and roots herself in hope and love. The closing line, "Only in Gaza, despite the pain, people remain, not only survivors, but warriors," is arguably the most impactful of the piece. The significance of framing citizens of Gaza as warriors and not survivors is that it gives them their humanity. Often, when we watch horrible acts on the news, we feel pity. We see people simply as victims without recognizing that they still cling to their humanity. They fight each and every day. They resist oppression. In the same breath that Plestia speaks of rubble and rockets, she also speaks of life and laughter—showing us that even amid destruction, the human spirit persists and presses on. The tension between tenderness and terror makes this poem unforgettable.



"A Night in Gaza"

Drawn by Gabrielle Christie

The image depicts a rocket flying over rubble. The rubble has a blanket draped on top.

# the Language of Peace is Art

By Gabrielle Christie and Savanna Giddens

## Peace Takes the Stage

Musical: Peace Child: The Musical by David Gordon  
Video: Peace Child Opening / Script: Peace Child Script

### Summary

Peace Child is a musical that imagines a world fifty years in the future where humanity has achieved complete peace. Then, in a flashback, the audience is taken back to current times and is challenged alongside the actors to critically think about the steps that must be taken to make this future possible. Peace Child has been performed thousands of times worldwide since its first production in 1981. It resonates with global audiences for its adaptability and message.

At its core, Peace Child emphasizes the power that youth play in reshaping conflict and division. Each production is uniquely adapted by its cast, with students having the ability to rewrite dialogue, lyrics, and scenes to reflect their lived experiences. The script is not static. Instead, it is a collaborative tool for imagining justice, sustainability, and understanding across cultures. Peace Child argues that peace is not passive; it is built through dialogue, creativity, and the courage to challenge the status quo. In every production, young people claim authorship over the future, showing that peace is not something to wait for, but something to create—together, here and now.

### Commentary by Gabrielle Christie

The opening of Peace Child emphasizes collective joy and pain. It is easy to think of peace as an unattainable entity. But peace doesn't rest on only one person's shoulders. The chorus of the opening of Peace Child says, "Come into my joy, come into my pain. Come—you be a friend of mine. I'll be the same." Triumphs are shared. Losses are shared. Life is shared as we journey towards a more peaceful world. Today, I, Gabrielle, think it is incredibly important to remember this sentiment. The path to a peaceful world is not linear. But we are also not on the path alone. Lean on your friends, your neighbors, even strangers as we try to make the world a better place.

"Peace on the Global Stage"  
Drawn by Gabrielle Christie  
The image depicts a stage with  
the title "Global Theatre"



# the Language of Peace is Art

By Gabrielle Christie and Savanna Giddens

## Songs of Peace

Peace3 by Stoney Creation, Jada Imani, and Maleik Dion  
 Link: [NegusWorld - Peace3 for the Desmond Tutu Peace Foundation](#)

### Summary + Commentary by Gabrielle Christie

Peace3 is a musical tribute created by youth under the Desmond Tutu Peace Foundation's Peace3 Initiative. The song features the voices of three young artists: Stoney Creation, Jada Imani, and Maleik Dion. They explore three dimensions of peace: inner peace, interpersonal harmony, and global unity. These dimensions are explored throughout the piece as peace within, peace between, and peace among. The lyricism and melodies reflect the diverse ways peace is shared, felt, and embodied. This song stands as a testament to how young, empowered voices can articulate profound ideas through art. It uses rhythm and rhyme to provoke deep thinking and to inspire collective action towards global peace.

### Contributors Bios

- \* **Stoney Creation (16)** is a songwriter who brings Peace3 to life with lyrics that center on self-reflection and balance. His voice in the project reminds us that peace begins within, before it can exist between people or across nations.
- \* **Jada Imani (16)** is a vocalist on the track. Her vocals are filled with warmth and clarity, making the song's message of connection feel personal. Peace transforms from abstract to tangible throughout the performance.
- \* **Maleik Dion (22)** is the oldest contributor to the track. He adds perspective to Peace3, instilling in the song the ideas of strength and hope. His age allows him to bridge the raw emotions of Stoney and Jada into something steady.



"Songs of Peace"  
 Drawn by Gabrielle Christie

The image depicts the open mouth of a person with music notes, peace symbols, and 3s parading out.

# the Language of Peace is Art

By Gabrielle Christie and Savanna Giddens

## Photographing & Painting Peace

Descriptions by Savanna Giddens

### Photographing Peace

Gab Mejia is a Filipino conservation photographer and multidisciplinary artist whose works deal with environmental issues and the impacts of climate change. His work, "The Passage of Storms," is an effective visual elegy documenting the devastation of Super Typhoon Rai (locally known as Odette) in the Philippines. Mejia's observations convey the permanent scars of the coastal communities, while also depicting a kind of resilience demonstrated by the people who are mandated to live with the reality of compounding disasters. His image demonstrates the human consequence of climate change and the urgency with which action must be taken globally.

*Photography: The Passage of Storms by Gab Mejia / Link: The Passage of Storms  
Award: 1st Place, #CreateCOP28 Art Competition (2023)*

### Painting Peace

Shuwen Wang is a young artist hailing from Dalian, China, and her love for creating, well-being, and social harmony is evident to anyone who views her work. Shuwen grew up in a fast-paced urban environment, which allowed her to look at both the challenges and benefits of living in a community. Her artwork "Peace Without Limits," illustrates a hopeful vision of an existence without conflict, specifically expressing that unity, cooperation, and endless possibilities occur when individuals get together. Shuwen demonstrates and expresses her hope of a future where understanding and friendship are not limited to cultural, geographical, or racial boundaries. The awarding of the Grand Prize in 2023 illustrates her talent for expressing those meaning-making ideas through youthful creativity.

*Visual Art: Peace Without Limits by Shuwen Wang / Link: Peace Without Limits  
Award: Grand Prize Winner, Lions International Peace Poster Contest (2023)*

### Closing

Art cannot stop a war or erase injustice on its own, but it can change how we understand conflict and how we imagine peace. The youth voices and visions we've shared reveal to us that peace is lived, demanded, and created every day. The artists' creations remind us that peace is built through empathy, dialogue, and the courage to hope when it feels impossible. As members of a generation that has grown up in times of uncertainty, we see in these works a call to action as much as a reflection. Peace, they teach us, is something we all must participate in shaping.

# Imagine Interviewee Quotes

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## Mira Sidawi, Palestinian Refugee in Lebanon

<https://vimeo.com/773309409?share=copy>

I used to feel that the trees - they're talking to me. Because of the huge silence that was there. It was so nice. I was just a little kid, you know, but I felt peace. I didn't have any ideas in my head related to my passport with a refugee stamp on it. I didn't have any ideas about being poor; I was just a little kid. I didn't know about Palestine. It was just a time I was sitting and feeling that the trees were talking to me, and that's all.

Whenever I go through a lot of struggles in my life or pain, I really try hard to go back to that scene. The moment when I was speaking to the trees.

## Melina Dahija, Bosnia & Herzegovina

<https://vimeo.com/700880003>

**What do you think your generation can do to create a better or stronger peace?  
Are you hopeful for a better future?**

"I'm forced to live with being cautious about who I'm befriending. Where I'm going. What I'm sharing with people.

## Dieudonne Gakire, Rwanda

<https://vimeo.com/786352409?fl=pl&fe=sh>

**Talk us through why [your artifact] signifies peace to you.**

"In the beginning it was very hard to find people to play with in my home village because many children of my age were killed during the genocide."

"In many villages in Rwanda or Africa, people, children they play this ball. Anywhere in the streets. Sometimes of course in the field."

"It reminds me (the ball) how this could bring people together, children together with a common goal. And the common goal is just winning you know. Or just entertaining ourselves."

# Imagine Interviewee Quotes

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## Velislava, Ukrainian Refugee in NYC

### How do you define "home"?

I used to feel that the trees - they're talking to me. Because of the huge silence that was "Now it's just like we don't have basically this feeling about home. I think it's just about having memories inside me. I'm feeling like home inside me basically just because I took like all my ideas, all my dreams together with me, no matter where I am. Now it's a completely different continent. Far away from Europe."

## Anastasia, Ukrainian Refugee in NYC

"And the first thing they started bombing was the airports. And it was really loud. Like extremely loud. And when you wake up, you kind of don't understand what's happening. Cause nobody believed it. Nobody could understand."

"And then you turn on the TV and see the news. And it was a little bit of a shocking situation. Your brain still doesn't - you can't comprehend what's going on. I started packing for school. I had my physics exam. And I said, 'No, I'm not missing it.' I was preparing for it. I was studying so hard. I can't miss it."

"There was a small little Ukrainian village on the border. And people were cooking us some food. They were taking it out. Some in the evening because it was cold. It was February. We made a fire on the side of the road. And people were inviting us to their house. To get some food or to use the facilities and stuff. It was really a uniting moment."

## Andrés Caicedo, Colombia

"But peace is like the horizon . . . Which means that you never get to the horizon. Like you walk towards the horizon, but you never get to a horizon, the horizon keeps on moving. As you are moving."

I mean, it's like an idea, I believe. I believe there is no, if there is the concept of an entirely peaceful place or situation or society, I don't believe such a thing exists.

So it is like a horizon, you walk towards it. And somehow you make progress, though the goal keeps on getting further and further away."

# Imagine Interviewee Quotes

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## Danny McCloy, Northern Ireland

"I think that integrated schools do give a very good chance to meet a bunch of people that have a bunch of different perspectives."

"I don't think we should forget what happened during it and what caused the trouble."

"I think if we're able to disregard the notion of Catholic and Protestant, effectively it's, they're meaningless titles. I think if we're able to recognize that then that would be a major move forward for our generation."

## Kiernon Patton, Northern Ireland

"It's impossible for someone to be who they are, or for someone to express their true interests, if they have to deal with conflict in their community."

"We've recognised that the fact that two people who are fundamentally opposed can still have a respect for each other's human need."

## Meena Karmani, Afghanistan

"I believe, I totally believe in the young generation in Afghanistan and other countries."

"Peace for me is when I see people going to school without fearing that they're gonna die."

"Music connects people. Music brings happiness, and with music, you can tell the stories without using guns. Things like that."

## Andrea Ayala, 2021 GenHR Fellow, USA

"Hearing the youth share their perspectives and reflections on peace has really helped me get a better understanding of the world around me. Many times, we hear about past conflicts, and we discard them as history when, in reality, they are still prevalent today. Being able to speak with youth who went through such hardship and explain peace from their own perspective changes the whole concept of the word."

# Bio graphies

Publisher &  
Special Guest Editor

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Generation  
Human Rights  
**Elana  
Haviv**

Elana Haviv, Ph.D., is the Founder and Executive Director of Generation Human Rights and the Co-Chair of Human Rights Educators USA. She has designed and implemented human rights-based curricula for schools throughout the United States, Europe, the Middle East, South Asia, and in refugee camp and humanitarian emergency settings worldwide. Elana also worked as an independent consultant and has edited and revised teaching materials on anti-Semitism for the OSCE/ODIHR and has authored four guides for UNESCO to assist teachers in initiating and managing constructive classroom discussion on violent extremism. In 2024, she served as an expert consultant for OHCHR's Education on the World Programme for Human Rights Education for Children and Youth, 5th Phase. Elana holds a master's in Historiography in Education from Antioch University McGregor and a Ph.D. in Leadership and Change from Antioch University. She is an Oral History Fellow at Columbia University and a Fellow at the George Eckert Institute of International Textbook Research. Elana is currently a visiting scholar at the Rutgers University Center for the Study of Genocide and Human Rights (CGHR).



Center for the  
Study of Genocide  
& Human Rights at  
Rutgers University  
**Nela  
Navarro**

Dr. Nela Navarro, Publisher Nela Navarro-LaPointe is an Associate Teaching Professor in the Department of English at Rutgers University, the State University of New Jersey and Director of Education, Associate Director, and member of the CGHR UNESCO Executive Committee at the Center for the Study of Genocide and Human Rights (CGHR) at Rutgers. Her research interests include language and social justice, linguistic discrimination, linguicide, writing studies, language rights, new literacies studies, critical pedagogy, arts across the curriculum, digital humanities, educational reform, comparative global education, human rights, genocide, and peace education. A recipient of Rutgers University's Presidential Award for Excellence in Teaching (2021), she regularly contributes to rights-based curriculum and professional development initiatives. She is an editor for the Rutgers University Press book series "Genocide, Human Rights, and Political Violence," translator for *Towards a Just Society: The Personal Journeys of Human Rights Educators* (University of Minnesota 2015), co-author of *Translingual Identities and Transnational Realities in the College Classroom* (Routledge 2020) and *Advancing Socially Driven Scholarship: The STAR Scholar Certified Researcher Training Program* (Star Scholars 2023).

# Bio graphies

## Imagine: Fellows & Writers

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### Carlos Araujo

I'm a Salvadoran student at Central European University, pursuing a BA in Culture, Politics, and Society. I have been involved in social awareness and impact activities, starting with family organized donations and later creating my own social project.



### Hafsa Asim

I'm a high school student in Leeds, England who is passionate about human rights. I am part of a small, sustainable business that has won multiple regional environmental awards. In my free time, I volunteer with a youth group and with local food banks. I'm also an active participant in the charity Peace Matters, which helps to relieve poverty and promote education in the United Kingdom and abroad. I hope to pursue a career in human rights law.



### Gabrielle Christie

I'm a senior at the Rockdale Magnet School for Science and Technology in Conyers, Georgia. I'm active in youth-led grassroots organizations, local political campaigns, and have served as a Youth Ambassador for the World Literacy Foundation. I hope to continue combining writing, policy, and community work to highlight underrepresented perspectives and push for a more just world.



### Savanna Giddens

I am a senior at Rockdale Magnet School for Science and Technology in Conyers, Georgia. Art has always been the way for me to understand the world around me. I believe that at a time when peace feels tenuous, art can carry resilience, beauty, and empathy across borders.

# Bio graphies

## Imagine: Fellows & Writers

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### Swara Gowdra

I am a senior at Monroe Township High School in New Jersey. I am passionate about human rights and hope to increase awareness of societal injustices around the world. I aim to add depth to what peace means today.



### Zarafshan Hussaini

I am pursuing my master's degree in Human Rights Law at Universitas Islam Indonesia. I am passionate about human rights and social justice and want to connect with dedicated individuals worldwide and exchange perspectives and experiences on human rights issues. Displacement has touched the lives of many Afghans, and I want to share their stories of pain, resilience, and strength.



### Aram Jung

I am a senior at Riverside High School in Greenville, South Carolina. I aim to interpret peace through the lens of color, drawing from conversations with young people in regions shaped by conflict. Through their voices, I seek to capture peace not as an abstract idea, but as a living, human experience.



### Isabella McAllister

I'm a high school senior in New Jersey passionate about equity and justice. I founded and currently lead my school's Human Rights Club, creating a safe space for discussions on civil liberties and advocacy. I am President of my school's chapter of the National Honor Society and serve as Chief of Publicity for NextGen Voices, a youth-led think tank. I plan to pursue a career in human rights law.

# Bio ographies

## Imagine: Fellows & Writers

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### Selena Said

I am a high school senior at Washington International School. I am interested in the realities faced by individuals who have fled conflicts. I believe hearing from direct sources provides a crucial perspective onto the brutal realities of human rights violations, highlighting what mass media excludes.



### Jazmin Tamez

I am a high school senior at the South Texas Science Academy. As the daughter of a migrant and my background as a Chicana in South Texas, I feel the need to shed light on the cruelty of human rights violations against migrant and immigrant communities. I have witnessed the systematic mistreatment of my community and hope that, with continued efforts, the public and policy will prioritize understanding of different individuals



### Sonia Vinh-Thomas

I am a high school senior at Eastside Preparatory School in Washington state. I am passionate about global justice and believe that honoring the stories of youth navigating crises is essential to understanding the human impact of conflict. I hope to shed light on the human rights challenges faced in war-affected regions and emphasize how education can remain both a lifeline and a source of hope.

# Bio graphies

## Imagine: Interviewees

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### Dieudonné Gakire

Dieudonné Gakire is a Rwandan writer, community organizer, and peace advocate dedicated to grassroots healing and youth empowerment. Born during Rwanda's civil war, he grew up in the aftermath of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, shaped by stories of loss, resilience, and hope. Following his studies, Dieudonné returned home and founded the Dusego Empowerment Hub, a rural center in southern Rwanda that promotes peacebuilding through education, dialogue, and creative opportunities for young people. Built with the participation of residents, including survivors and ex-combatants, the Hub provides a public library, a training space, and a gathering place for young families. Dieudonné was interviewed in 2022 for the Imagine project, during which he discussed peace, memory, and how conflict shapes young generations.



### Velislava Kuzmenko

Velislava Kuzmenko is a Ukrainian journalist based in New York. She holds a bachelor's degree in Journalism from Kyiv National University of Culture and Arts and is pursuing a second degree in Finance at Baruch College's Zicklin School of Business, with a minor in Journalism. A member of the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine, Velislava reports on political, business, and cultural issues. She is currently an editorial intern at The New York Review of Books. Velislava was interviewed for the Imagine project in 2024, sharing her personal experience of the war in Ukraine and her refugee journey.



### Anastasia Panchenko

Anastasia Panchenko is a New York-based Ukrainian creative and researcher exploring the intersection of politics, media, and global risk. Studying Finance at Baruch College's Zicklin School of Business, she blends analytical work with storytelling and advocacy. Anastasia has worked with The Reckoning Project and with Razom for Ukraine, contributing to war crimes documentation, conducting media analysis, and raising public awareness about the situation in Ukraine. She has also organized community initiatives and collaborated on international human rights projects. Anastasia was interviewed for the Imagine project in 2023, speaking about displacement, resilience, and what it means to build a life between two worlds.

# Bio ographies

## Imagine: Interviewees

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### Melina Dahija

Melina Dahija was born in Travnik, Bosnia and Herzegovina and received dual bachelor's degrees in 2023 from the University of Sarajevo in English and Turkish language and literature. Throughout her studies, Melina participated in peacebuilding, student activism, and efforts to improve educational quality. She subsequently earned a master's degree in English Language Teaching and is now an English teacher at her former middle school. In 2022, Melina took part in the Imagine: NextGen Voices Reflect on Peace project, offering her perspective on post-war Bosnia and the experiences that have shaped her generation. Her contribution emphasized the importance of cultural understanding and youth engagement in long-term peacebuilding.



### Andrés Caicedo

Andrés Caicedo is an independent researcher, curator, and concept designer from Colombia, currently based in Mendoza, Argentina. Andrés is completing his thesis for a master's in Studies on Photographic Images and Archives. He is also writing a book about photography in Colombia in the framework of the Cold War. Andrés has worked at artists' studios around the world, assisting in project production, archival management, and concept design. He was an associate of the Bogota-based OjoRojo Visual Factor Foundation from 2018-2022, co-curating exhibitions and public talks and coordinating photographic research with partners such as the Colombian Truth Commission and Bogota's Center for Memory, Peace, and Reconciliation.



### Mira Sidawi

Mira Sidawi graduated from Lebanese University with a diploma in theater. A Palestinian actress, writer, and director, she has acted in several short films and feature films, including *Permission*, *Instead of a Homeland*, and *Mon Souflé*. Most recently, she has turned to directing with wit and a sharp eye to tell the stories of Palestinian life in the camps.

# Bio ographies

## Imagine: Interviewees

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### Meena Karimi

Meena Karimi is a cellist, composer, and women's rights advocate from Afghanistan. Born in 2006, she began her musical studies on cello and dilruba and is currently a student at Harvard University. Meena has been featured in the Financial Times, The New York Times Magazine, and on NBC News and the BBC World Service. She was featured in the VII Foundation's Imagine: Reflections on Peace exhibit. Meena enjoys sharing her experiences living in the United States through her newsletter and website.

### Special Thanks

Students Kieron Patton and Danny McCloy for their insightful storytelling. And to Hazelwood Integrated College for participation in the Imagine project. Hazelwood Integrated College is an award-winning post-primary school in North Belfast, Northern Ireland, with an outstanding record of pastoral care and academic achievement.

# Bio graphies

Generation Human Rights  
Special  
Contributors

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## Szymon Jezewski

Szymon works for the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), an international organization based in Paris, France, dedicated to developing better policies for better lives. Szymon was part of GenHr's first cohort of Imagine fellows in 2021-2022, where he conducted Imagine interviews with peers in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Rwanda, and other countries. Szymon served as a GenHR



## Andrea Ayala

Andrea is currently pursuing a law degree at the Inter American University, School of Law. She recently graduated magna cum laude from the University of Puerto Rico with a bachelor's in Modern Languages and a minor in Human Rights. Andrea is passionate about peace education and is hoping to further her work in the human rights field. Andrea was part of GenHR's first cohort of Imagine fellows in 2021-2022, where she conducted Imagine interviews with peers in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Rwanda, and other countries. Andrea served as a GenHR facilitator for the Special Olympics Virtual Global Summit, Connecting in Times of Conflict, in 2022.



## Yelizavieta Shurubor

Yelizavieta is a fourth-year student at Central European University, specializing in Economics and Politics. Born and raised in Ukraine, she was fortunate to begin her studies as the war started. Yelizavieta's goal is to keep reminding the world of the current reality in Ukraine and the daily struggles Ukrainians are forced to endure. Yelizavieta has prioritized awareness rising about the impacts the war has had on students' learning and the lack of access to quality education in frontline areas.



## María Paula Barrantes

Born in Costa Rica, María Paula is a Latin graphic designer and visual artist with seven years of experience. A fourth-year student at Universidad de Diseño, Innovación y tecnología in Madrid, Spain, María Paula enjoys exploring new tools and creative approaches to solving visual challenges

# Bio ographies Facilitators

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Greg  
Ayres

Greg is a writer and arts education specialist based in Brooklyn, New York. Greg has worked as a project manager, content developer, and strategic planner for non-profits, cultural institutions, foundations, and private sector corporations. Greg has worked with Generation Human Rights on multiple projects. He was a classroom instructor for GenHR's 9/11 Trauma Relief Program, and he worked with both NYC students as well as youth abroad for the Telling History Project in Bosnia and the US. This year, Greg will be celebrating twenty years of collaboration with GenHR!



Austin  
Emery

Austen Emery is currently a senior at San Diego State University studying Political Science and Interdisciplinary Studies. Interested in learning from the work of the Generation Human Rights summer fellows and board of directors, Austin chose to work as a youth facilitator for GenHR. Collaborating with GenHR has taught him that we must never take our rights for granted, and securing the rights of others requires critical storytelling and investigation.



Raúl Chico  
Goler

Chico is the owner and principal of Estudio Grafika based in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Goler is a graphic and visual designer and specializes in creating non-profit websites. Goler produced the online sites as well as curricula portals for Generation Human Rights. Examples include the Millennium Villages Project Interactive Classroom Program and Travelling Mobile Exhibit, the Lost Rolls America Education project and the Telling History Project.

# Bio graphies

## The VII Foundation

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Producer  
& Filmmaker

**Fiona  
Turner**

Fiona is a five-time Emmy award-winning producer and documentary filmmaker. After 20 years of broadcast experience with ABC News and NBC News, much of it in war zones and areas of conflict, she now focuses her narrative storytelling on social justice and human rights issues with The VII Foundation.

Her documentary feature "Eat Up" follows a philanthropic entrepreneur as she sets to elevate school meals within Boston Public Schools. Fiona produced and co-edited The VII Foundation multi-platform project, "Imagine: Reflections on Peace", a book, short films, exhibition, and education project examining post conflict nations. Most recently Fiona produced the documentary film, "The Stringer" which premiered at Sundance 2025 and was released on Netflix, November 2025.



Filmmaker &  
Photojournalist

**Ron  
Haviv**

Ron Haviv is an Emmy-nominated filmmaker and an award-winning photojournalist. He co-founded VII Photo Agency and The VII Foundation, where he currently serves as a director. He is dedicated to documenting conflict, post-conflict, and raising human rights issues around the globe.

His work in the Balkans was used as evidence to indict & convict war criminals at the international tribunal in The Hague. President H.W. Bush cited Haviv's photographs documenting paramilitary violence in Panama as one of the reasons for the 1989 American intervention.

His photography is in museum collections around the world, and he has published five monographs. Haviv is the subject of numerous documentaries, including National Geographic Explorer's Freelance in a World of Risk. He has written opinion pieces for the Washington Post and The New York Times and spoken at TedX along with numerous other media outlets and lectures at universities and conferences.

# Imagine Educator Multimedia Resources

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## Imagine: NextGen Voices Reflect on Peace

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The Program:

<https://www.generationhumanrights.org/imagine-next-gen-voices-reflect-on-peace>

The Curriculum:

<https://www.generationhumanrights.org/imagine-next-gen-modules>

*Multimedia is integrated into all of the lessons. Here are samples:*

Bosnia and Herzegovina: Melina Dahija

<https://vimeo.com/700880003>

Afghanistan: Meena Karmani

<https://vimeo.com/731731461>

Palestine/Lebanon: Mira Sidawi

<https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/827788461>

Rwanda: Youth Dialogue with Gakire Diuedonne about his Peace Artifact

<https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/786352409>

Bosnia and Herzegovina: Youth Dialogue with Melina Dahija about her Peace Artifact

<https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/786344314>

Northern Ireland Youth Voices on Peace

English Version: <https://vimeo.com/712812875?share=copy&fl=sv&fe=ci>

Bosnian Subtitles: <https://vimeo.com/701651614?share=copy&fl=sv&fe=ci>

## Five Senses Video

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Taste:

<https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/868843042>

Smell:

<https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/868842902>

All Five Senses on a Video Loop:

<https://vimeo.com/903677638?fl=pl&fe=sh>

## Imagine: NextGen Voices Reflect on Peace; Classroom to Classroom

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The Program:

<https://www.generationhumanrights.org/imagine-next-gen-voices-reflect-on-peace-copy>

# Imagine Educator Multimedia Resources

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## Imagine: Reflections on Peace

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Overview: Home Page

Project Overview:

<https://reflectionspeace.org/>

Preview Book - Imagine: Reflections on Peace

<https://vimeo.com/463396275?fl=ls&fe=ec>

Project Overview

<https://vimeo.com/462914962?fl=ls&fe=ec>

Rwanda: Beyond the Swamp

<https://vimeo.com/436208853?fl=ls&fe=ec>

Rwanda: Benevolencija-Radio Soap Opera

<https://vimeo.com/708231209?fl=ls&fe=ec>

Rwanda: Rwandan Gorillas, Eco Tourism

<https://vimeo.com/436808169?fl=ls&fe=ec>

Bosnian Voices

<https://vimeo.com/701657104?fl=ls&fe=ec>

Bosnia: Elvis Garibovic. A Story of One Man's Survival & Recovery

<https://vimeo.com/695696300?fl=ls&fe=ec>

Bosnia: Speak Out!

A New Generation of Bosnians Examines Their Experience of the Past & Hope for the Future.

(In Bosnian with English subtitles)

<https://vimeo.com/754676689?fl=ls&fe=ec>

Bosnian Voices

<https://vimeo.com/701657104>

Afghan Voices

<https://vimeo.com/701672510?fl=ls&fe=ec>



## The Center for the Study of Genocide and Human Rights (CGHR)

CGHR's mission is to understand and prevent genocide and mass atrocity crimes.

In doing so, CGHR takes a critical prevention approach.

On the one hand, we grapple with critical human rights issues, including the most pressing 21st century challenges that may give rise to genocide, atrocity crimes, and related interventions. On the other hand, we use a critical lens to rethink assumptions and offer alternative ideas and solutions.

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“The Center for the Study of Genocide and Human Rights (CGHR) at Rutgers expresses deep gratitude to guest editor Dr. Elana Haviv, The VII Foundation Director Ron Haviv, The VII Foundation Project Director Fiona Turner, designer Raúl Chico Goler, Th VII Foundation, Generation Human Rights, and the Generation Human Rights Fellows, whose impactful writing and interviews created this special edition on Voices of Peace.”

- Nela Navarro, Associate Director, Director of Education,  
CGHR@ Rutgers University



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