

by Johnny Barber

Four decades of war. Two million people dead. Trillions of dollars spent. Money disappearing into the pockets of corrupt politicians, bureaucrats, policemen and the armed forces. No accountability. No transparency. No infrastructure. The misery and poverty of the majority of the people continues unabated, decade after decade. Children freeze to death in the winter. They starve to death all year round. The question remains, "Who benefits from this misery?" The human cost of war doesn't enter into any politician's calculations.

In October 2011 Secretary of State Clinton emphasized a new three-track strategy of "Fight, talk, and build," claiming to "pursue all three tracks at once, as they are mutually reinforcing." One year later, it is clear that the 3rd Afghan strategy of the Obama administration can be added to the scrap heap of failed strategies along with the "Af-Pak" strategy and the "Surge". No one is talking, nothing is being built, fighting is the only track that continues unabated. Security, even in Kabul, is tenuous. Peace seems a distant and illusory concept.

On Sunday, September 2nd, the Afghan Peace Volunteers held a press conference in Kabul, Afghanistan to introduce a new strategy, called the "2 Million Friends" initiative. Built on a foundation of hope and goodwill, this initiative calls on ordinary citizens of all countries to join with ordinary Afghan citizens, who are tired of corruption, hatred and war, to be friends. When asked about the role of international people, Roz Mohammed, a young man from Midan Wardak replied, "The international people are just like us, ordinary people who want to work with us for peace." The wish is for 2 million friends, in remembrance of each of the 2 million Afghan victims of 40 years of war in Afghanistan, to join together and appeal for peace. 2 million friends to tell our respective governments, "Enough! We wish to live without war."

"2 Million Friends" is not just an initiative to be "liked" or "shared" on the Internet. It is about recognizing our shared humanity. When we see the suffering of a friend, we do not stand by and wish things were different, we act to end their suffering. "2 Million Friends" is a call to action here, here, and here.

On December 10, 2012, International Human Rights Day, "2 Million Friends" will present a petition to the UN calling for an immediate ceasefire in Afghanistan, leading to direct, substantial talks to end the war, end the government corruption and begin to advocate for the welfare of the majority of the Afghan people who have suffered for too long.

The Afghan Peace Volunteers is a unique organization in Afghanistan. Its members are young volunteers from all the major ethnic groups. They live together and promote peaceful coexistence, simple living and self-reliance. They receive no salary, and they don't promote any particular religious or political party. They are truly independent. In the fractured, war torn country of Afghanistan, this alone is a remarkable achievement. When asked why they focus on the youth, Ali a young man from Bamyan Province replied, "We need everyone's help, but we focus on the youth because they are the future of Afghanistan!" Shaima, a young woman from Parwan added, "When the youth have information about non-violence and peace they will not be so willing to continue to fight." The Afghan Peace Volunteers are growing, even in the face of enormous challenges, and they invite everyone who desires peace through non-violence to be their friend!

To become one of 2 Million Friends, visit

<http://www.2millionfriends.org>

And on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/2millionfriends>

Johnny Barber is representing Voices for Creative Nonviolence as a guest of the Afghan Peace Volunteers in Kabul. His blog and website are:

www.oneBrightpearl-jb.blogspot.com

and

www.oneBrightpearl.com.