

Peace and Harmony Gathering On the Eve of World Interfaith Harmony Week

Afghanistan Youth Empowerment and Peace-building Organization (AYEPO) organized a "Peace & Harmony Gathering" from the 5th to 7th February 2020, on the eve of the World Interfaith Harmony Week to enhance mutual understanding, peace and harmony among Afghan youth.

In the program, youth from different ethnic groups came together to celebrate diversity and learn how to promote peace and harmony in their lives, families and communities. They shared stories with each other, speaking about where they live, how they celebrate different occasions in their communities, and their lives in general. Participants talked about the common grounds they shared with each other and how such commonalities could unite them. They also discussed the role of youth in peace-building, social changes, creating unity and how young people from diverse backgrounds could collectively bridge cultural gaps and other differences, thus working with one another for the future they all share.

Talking about these issues was not all. The spirit of these discussions was embodied and experienced in a powerful process where the youth cooked meals together, ate with one another, drew pictures and sang together with open hearts. The experience emphasized that overall, and despite their differences, they were united and could peacefully coexist in their diversity.

Why such a gathering is important in Afghanistan?

Most Afghan youth have lived a life shaped and influenced by conflict and violence. Not many of us have experienced life in a peaceful and united environment —far from psychological, physical harms as well as lack of unity, discrimination and division. Although a lot of progress has happened in the past 19 years in the areas of education, women's rights, and human rights, no particular attention has been given to youth, especially in bringing youth of different backgrounds together so that they can learn about each other, bridge social and cultural gaps and see how they can relate and work for the future they all share. Lack of attention in this regard often contributed to lack of common vision among youth. As a result they have a different outlook towards those who come from different ethnic groups – meaning that there is misconception and also division among the youth.

Hence, our Peace and Harmony Gathering was an effort to reduce the current divisions among youth. We accomplished this by bringing a group of youth from different ethnicities together to meet face-to-face, share meals, share stories, listen to each other's perspectives, and discuss topics of peace and reconciliation together. They meditated and learnt how to calm and relax their minds through breathing techniques. They drew pictures, made music and then united around ideas for change within their communities and transferring the lessons learnt, a message of peace, social harmony, love and brotherhood in their families, communities and society at large.