

Third Edition

# International Women's Day: Messages From Young Afghan Women



[WWW.APTYOUTH.ORG](http://WWW.APTYOUTH.ORG)

# Messages From Young Afghan Women

In Afghanistan, alongside the humanitarian crises and violence, there exists a glaring reality of systematic marginalization of women in public and political spheres. Despite shouldering a critical role in upholding families in these harsh conditions, they are deprived of their basic rights and even the ability to travel freely within their own country. These difficulties are made worse by the Taliban's enforcement of media restrictions, which have created a curtain over their problems. Notwithstanding these challenges, Afghan women's tenacity and resolve shine through, acting as rays of hope for a time when they would be able to recover their rights and make a meaningful contribution to society.

In honor of International Women's Day, APT presents a special edition of its Messages collection, which spotlights the personal journeys of Afghan girls and women. Each contribution exemplifies their resilience, dedication, and success in overcoming challenges. Whether through creative expression or stories of resilience, every message carries a powerful inspiration. Through their narratives, artwork, and messages, we aim to illuminate the strength, courage, and determination defining their experiences.

We would like to express our appreciation to the young female participants whose contributions have made this edition truly special. Their dedication and insights have added depth and diversity to our publication, enriching the collective narrative. Special thanks are also extended to the executive team of APT for their invaluable guidance and support provided to the participants.

## About APT.

Afghans for Progressive Thinking (APT) is a youth-led nonprofit organization in Afghanistan that actively addresses human rights crises, with a specific focus on women's rights, while simultaneously promoting girls' access to education through creative and impactful initiatives.

Since its inception in 2010, APT activities have impacted and inspired over 60,000 youth and children to build a vision for a just and inclusive society.

### “ 1. Roots in Afghanistan:

Born in the rugged and resilient land of Afghanistan, I, Lima Amarkhil, emerged into a world shaped by centuries of history, conflict, and unwavering spirit. The sun-kissed mountains and the whispering winds of Kabul Province witnessed my first breaths. In the bustling streets of the 3rd District, where the past and present intertwine, I learned the art of survival—the delicate balance between hope and resilience.

### 2. The Scholar's Path:

My footsteps led me from dusty alleyways to the hallowed halls of academia. With determination etched into my heart, I pursued knowledge at college. There, amidst the scent of old books and the hum of eager minds, I discovered my passion: teaching. English became my bridge—a connection to the wider world beyond the borders of my homeland. As I delved into grammar rules and poetic verses, I realized that education was my beacon, illuminating the path toward progress.

### 3. Nurturing Young Minds:

Today, as a devoted teacher, I stand before a classroom filled with curious eyes and boundless potential. The laughter of children echoes off the walls, and their innocent questions ignite my soul. Teaching English to these young hearts is not merely about vocabulary and syntax; it's about empowering dreams. I watch as they grasp new words, their eyes widening like blossoming flowers. In their laughter, I find hope—for them, for Afghanistan, and for a future where education transcends borders and transforms lives.

**- Lima Amarkhil**

“ I am talking about women who are true leaders, those who are not afraid, those who stand like mountains and no gust of wind can shake them, those who hope and believe amid all uncertainties, those who have tenderness, elegance, and at the same time are rebellious and firm. What I want young women and girls to know is that you are powerful and your voice matters.

**- Mursal Rahimi**

“ Women’s Day celebrates the very essence of women all over the world. This day marks the importance of why women should be treated equally without any bias or prejudice. This day is commemorated to honor women of all ages and races in a world where they can live freely and up to their terms. Women have always been suppressed by some kind of force that has restricted their choices and freedom. But as times are progressing, women are rising to their full potential and taking steps to ensure they have the means, choice, and freedom to speak, and do whatever they want.

**- Marwa Amin**

“ Despite all odds, we hope and strive for a better future. In this International Women’s Day, I want to remind everyone that we are still being restricted our most basic rights. For us, education is prohibited. Employment is limited. We are banned from going to parks. The environment is getting more suffocating. But despite everything, we hope. We believe. We carry on and continue to live. From any opportunity that we can find, we learn and acquire new skills. Then we share the newly gained knowledge with other girls in our communities. We are stronger than ever because we are together!

**- Husay Jalil**

“ In a world filled with numerous voices, I can hear the strong voice of a woman who walks with peace, laughs with love, and stands with power. Today, my heart is filled with immense admiration as I write about a woman who, with her unwavering strength, has conquered every obstacle that life has hurled at her. I can deeply sense the resolute strides she has taken, fearlessly asserting her identity as a woman. She is a truly exceptional individual, blessed with the extraordinary ability to transform this boundless universe into a haven where the resounding voice of freedom finds solace, a sanctuary that echoes with the triumph of her spirit.

**- Katayoun Rafat**

“ I have changed schools five times in pursuit of better academic progression. It all began with my mom’s dream, shaped by the first time the Taliban took leadership in Afghanistan in 1996. They denied girls like her an education. My mother wanted to be a physician but was forced to abandon university. My goal as a child was to make her happy. I studied as hard as possible to fulfill my mother’s dream. Consequently, I took the national university entrance exam and was successfully accepted to Herat University.

After six semesters, the Taliban took control again and banned girls from educational centers. The uncertainty of the future kept me up at night, thinking that my mom’s story was about to repeat. I know life is an incessant battlefield, and there will be pivotal moments that may change our lives forever, but at the end of the story, I have learned to chase what truly makes me happy and to see every single challenge as a stepping stone toward my dreams. Today, I am writing about my insatiable thirst for higher education. I am ready to write my story by my own hand, just as my mother did in 2013 by graduating from university.

**- Aqdas Yawar**

“ Afghanistan has 34 provinces and hundreds of girls who are trying to achieve the dreams they have planted in their minds and hearts. Education and training are the most essential pillars to achieve our dreams and goals. We believe that opening a school door closes a prison door, eliminates corruption and injustice, and at the same time increases solidarity, equality, and stability. Education brings awareness and empowerment to us, and it is a bright light from the heart of dark and stony mountains. It is awareness that leads society to settlement. Meanwhile, education and training are the tellers of peace for which we are trying to open the door to the destruction of society. I really want to make the girls who are left out of education realize their dreams and give them a different color. Freedom of work, freedom of expression, and choice should be given to women and girls who have taken up the pen to paint their surroundings beautifully. We are girls with colorful dreams, dreams where each color symbolizes education, work, training, peace, cooperation, acceptance, friendship, forgiveness, faith, effort, being a woman, being a girl, and me. We, girls, are looking for heaven with black and white people in the valley of darkness, a heaven for the women and girls of the land of Afghanistan, away from injustices

and inequalities, with freedom of education, freedom of work, freedom of speech, freedom of travel, and freedom of choice for the country where unemployment, poverty, illiteracy, and destitution are rampant. My fellow humans and I are trying to make these beautiful dreams come true, to strengthen the roots as best as possible, in the midst of all the challenges from closing the doors of schools and universities to the arrest and harassment of girls in Afghanistan, and hundreds of alternative challenges and problems. We believe that it will open the light and destroy the darkness, even though every day this path becomes more difficult. In the midst of a lot of challenges, my fellows and I are looking for the moonlight in the absolute blackness of the dark night without any stars. Hoping for the day when Afghan women and girls have full access to their most basic rights without any challenge and be their own leaders in society.

### - Maryam Rezayee

“ As I wake up in my prison cell, so-called home, the place where women must be, the familiar sights and sounds of confinement surround me. The cold, hard walls seem to mock me as I long for the freedom that was once mine. I gaze out of the small window, watching as the trees outside begin to bloom with the arrival of spring. It's a bittersweet sight, as I can't help but feel a pang of jealousy towards the plants that are free to grow and flourish without restraint.

I find myself drawn to the window each morning, desperate to inhale the fresh morning breeze that carries hints of a world I once knew. A world where Maryam was alive, where we could roam freely and enjoy the simple pleasures of life. But now, everything has changed. It's been four long years since the Taliban imposed their cruel restrictions on us, forcing us to dress like dementors from Harry Potter, but with a cruelty that even Voldemort would find appalling.

I yearn for the days when the streets were filled with people, when girls wore colorful headscarves, and laughter echoed through the air. But now, all I have are memories, fading like the distant echoes of a long-lost dream. As I stand by the window, tears welling up in my eyes, I can't help but wonder if spring will ever come again for us. If we will ever be free to bloom and grow like the trees outside, or if we will remain trapped in this prison. I am waiting for the day that we'll be freed



from this cage, and I hope that day comes soon.

**- Sadaf Ahmadi**

“ International Women’s Day means coming together in the same united world with strong spirits. Despite facing many difficulties, we stood united, speaking out with a strong will to resist oppression. Every step we took and every word we said showed our lasting strength and bravery. Even when facing challenges, we as Afghan women refused to stay silent. We carried hope and a desire for change, determined not to let obstacles stop us from reaching our goals. With each beat of our hearts, we promised to break free from inequality and injustice, knowing our voices could bring about powerful change. As the sun rose on International Women’s Day, we felt pride and determination, ready to face any future challenges with unwavering strength. And we wait for a bright future by enhancing our abilities, as the brightness of our life may have dimmed, but there is still hope for making our lives much better and struggling to reach our goals, shining like stars within the boundaries for the life of our family, friends, and community.

**- Hooria Sultanzada**

“ In the midst of turmoil and uncertainty in Afghanistan, the APT organization became a guiding light in my journey towards higher education and empowerment. Despite the challenges posed by the arrival of the Taliban, I refused to abandon my dreams and instead focused on learning English and pursuing opportunities beyond borders. With the support of APT, I, as a 17-year-old girl, am determined to achieve higher education, showcase the strength of girls, and create a brighter future for my family.

Having faced rejection and tragedy, I have learned the value of resilience and self-reliance. Through defying societal norms and overcoming personal loss, I have emerged stronger and more determined to uplift marginalized girls. Driven by unwavering dreams and a passion for showcasing women’s capabilities, I am committed to overcoming

obstacles and finding strength in the face of adversity with the support of organizations like APT.

### - Shukria Nazari

“ Women are truly remarkable beings, embodying a unique fusion of strength and gentleness akin to delicate flowers. This dual nature makes them exceptionally special. Observing the resilience of Afghan women has been simultaneously heartbreaking and uplifting. Despite confronting unimaginable obstacles, they persist in spreading love and compassion within their families and communities, even amidst the turmoil and tragedy that surrounds them.

■ It saddens me to witness how Afghan society has systematically deprived these women of their aspirations and basic rights, leaving them in a perpetual struggle. It is a harsh reality they are compelled to endure.

■ Nevertheless, amidst this darkness, I cling to hope for a brighter future for all Afghan women. I yearn to witness genuine smiles illuminate their faces, reflecting the strength and beauty inherent within them. May the day come when they are liberated to fulfill their full potential and lead lives of dignity and freedom.

### - Nazia Amiri

“ This is Tahmina Rahraw. I would describe myself as a hard-working and driven individual who is unafraid of challenges. I am passionate about my work and possess the determination to accomplish tasks effectively. I value honesty and transparency in all my interactions, striving to maintain fairness in my endeavors.

I graduated from the Faculty of Social Sciences at Kabul University. Initially, I embarked on a teaching career for one and a half years in various government and private schools. However, realizing that teaching was not my true calling, I made a significant change and



pursued studies in medical school. Unfortunately, the Taliban's ban on universities for girls severely impacted my career and personal life, leaving me adrift for six or seven months. With the support of my family and close friends, I gradually adopted a positive outlook, engaging in a leadership program, enrolling in online courses such as DBA, graphic design, TOEFL preparation, and professional English writing. I remained committed to learning new skills, pursuing my dream of becoming a doctor through volunteer work at a clinic, and cultivating a reading habit that proved invaluable in navigating life's challenges.

While my education remains incomplete, I harbor significant aspirations that are hindered by the current challenges and barriers faced by women in Afghanistan. Nonetheless, I am unwavering in my determination to fulfill my dream of becoming a doctor. My passion for medical health and my desire to positively impact people's lives motivate me. With resilience as my guiding force, I am resolute in overcoming obstacles and advancing towards my goal of becoming a doctor, dedicated to enhancing the well-being of others through compassionate and expert medical care.

### - Tahmina Rahraw

“ The tale of a 16-year-old girl named Arzoo:

Arzoo nurtured a profound aspiration to become a healer, to comfort the ill and aid her people with empathy. Her heart brimmed with visions of a future where she could impact the world. However, destiny had different intentions for her.

As winds of change swept through the land, ushering in new laws and constraints, Arzoo's world underwent a drastic transformation. The government proclaimed that girls were forbidden to pursue education or follow their aspirations. A shadow loomed over Arzoo and her female peers, casting doubt on their future prospects.

Nevertheless, Arzoo refused to succumb to defeat. With unwavering resolve, she persisted in preparing for her entrance examinations, despite the impediments in her path. Round the clock, she devoted herself to her studies, propelled by an inner flame that burned brightly.

When the time arrived to submit exam forms, the girls encountered another harsh setback. They were instructed to hand over their forms to the boys, a poignant reminder of the disparities they faced. Though tears welled up in their eyes, Arzoo remained steadfast, a bastion of resilience in adversity's wake.

Following a series of trials, a glimmer of hope materialized. An examination was conducted for girls in grade 12, offering them a chance at graduation. Arzoo seized this opportunity ardently, studying diligently and giving her all to the forthcoming challenge.

However, the revelation of the results bore bitter disappointment. Arzoo, once a top student, now found herself relegated to grade 10. The weight of frustration pressed down upon her, poised to erode her spirit. In a moment of despair, she made a pivotal choice that would alter her life's course.

Establishing a makeshift classroom in her abode, Arzoo commenced teaching the neighborhood girls, imparting her knowledge and wisdom to those deprived of education. She became a beacon of optimism in her community, a guiding light in a world obscured by shadows.

Presently, Arzoo stands proudly as a manager in a distinguished company, her spirit unbowed and her resolve unyielding. Yet, deep within her heart, the dream of becoming a doctor still burns fervently. She remains steadfast in her belief that one day, she will realize her aspirations and fulfill her fate.

For all the girls grappling with adversity and trials, Arzoo's message resounds clearly: never surrender. Amidst the darkest hours, a flicker of hope always endures. Persist, believe, and uphold the power of resilience and determination. Ultimately, our challenges mold us, fostering resilience and fortitude. Love yourself, believe in yourself, and never cease reaching for the stars.

**- Humaira Amiri**

“ Big dreams require significant efforts! I am Mitra Shahnawazi, a recent graduate from the Faculty of Law and Political Sciences at Kabul University, with a strong passion for books, education,

photography, and assisting others. Scoring 306 marks in the Kankor exam, I secured admission to my preferred faculty, where I have honed various skills including leadership, public speaking, and computer programming. I have also engaged in activities such as teaching English and volunteering in capacity-building and human resources initiatives.

Furthermore, I have gained knowledge of arbitration and legal training through mock court sessions and legal programs. Following my university graduation, I dedicated six to nine months to virtual leadership programs with the Aspire Institute and APT organization.

I firmly believe that no obstacle can impede our pursuit of education. Even in challenging circumstances, we can support each other in learning and accessing diverse opportunities. In conclusion, I wish to emphasize never giving up in the face of circumstances beyond our control. Instead, let's learn from these experiences to emerge stronger and more empowered.

**- Mitra Shahnawazi**

## “ Renaissance of Afghan Women

Afghanistan, a nation steeped in tradition with a rich history spanning a millennium, bears witness to the heroic tales of women like Malalai, Kubra Noorzai, and Latifa Saraj, who stand as beacons of inspiration for all. Despite weary spirits and shattered hearts, Afghan women, fueled by a glimmer of hope, commemorate International Women's Day on the 8th of March with strength, resilience against injustice, and unwavering resolve.

Confronting societal barriers that seek to deny them education and knowledge, Afghan women refuse to yield. With trembling hands and unshakeable determination, they take to the streets, standing up in the absence of male defenders. These are true warriors who raise their voices in defiance in all circumstances. Behind eyes that bear the scars of war and tears, lies a fire, an indomitable spirit that refuses to be silenced. These women are fighters who draw strength from their femininity, relentlessly and tirelessly advocating for their natural

and acquired rights, a struggle that resonates throughout history. Yet, this journey of struggle and sacrifice has been arduous, marked by unparalleled acts of selflessness as they continue to raise their voices across all eras and situations. Their battle persists.

I am firmly convinced that we are on the cusp of witnessing an unprecedented Renaissance of Afghan women, a phenomenon that will evoke awe worldwide. Let our commitment to girls' education remain unwavering. Let us provide them with encouragement, motivation, and hope to pave the way for a brighter future.

**- Sarah Zaheer**

“ This is Maryam Batori residing in Kabul, Afghanistan. I graduated with a degree in Business Administration (BBA) in 2021. On this International Women's Day, I aim to spotlight the challenges faced by Afghan women and their remarkable resilience in overcoming them. These obstacles include limited access to education, domestic violence, forced marriages, and adherence to stringent traditions. The recent governmental policies have exacerbated these difficulties, making it even more challenging for women to pursue their dreams.

I have encountered my own set of struggles, despite familial opposition and prevailing security concerns. Nevertheless, I persisted in pursuing my academic passions and even engaged in employment while studying. Overcoming significant emotional and psychological obstacles, including trauma stemming from governmental regulations, was a strenuous journey, not just for me but for girls throughout the nation. However, I refused to surrender. Adapting to the circumstances, I diligently worked towards achieving my aspirations.

I am immensely grateful for the invaluable support and encouragement provided by APT's exceptional team and their empowering programs. My affiliation with APT has instilled in me a sense of perpetual hope and determination. Presently, I manage a small business, enhance my linguistic skills, attend drawing classes to combat depression, and am

preparing to pursue a Master's degree. Despite life's challenges, my resilience perseveres, and I grow stronger each day.

### - Maryam Batori

“ Women are powerful and resilient individuals who wield immense influence in society. They showcase remarkable strength, courage, and determination in surmounting obstacles and chasing their aspirations. Women demonstrate versatility across a spectrum of roles, excelling in professions, caregiving, leadership, creativity, and activism. Through their nurturing, inspirational, and exemplary leadership, they make substantial contributions to the advancement and enhancement of communities worldwide. It is essential to recognize, honor, and provide equal opportunities to women, enabling them to flourish and prosper in all facets of life. Serving as the cornerstone of families, the catalysts for change, and the embodiment of elegance and tenacity, women merit not only celebration but also profound respect.

In Afghanistan, women persevered through the turmoil of conflict, bearing the brunt of war and strife. Hence, it is imperative that women are granted unrestricted access to their fundamental rights.

### - Sorya Nabizada

“ This is who I am, existing without rights and with a voice you cannot hear. I can only dream of my future, harboring grand plans. I eagerly await the light of tomorrow, count the stars at night, and yearn to witness a joyful version of myself. My heartfelt desires include donning my favorite dress, smiling without fear, venturing outdoors without a veil, capturing moments through photography in my town, traveling solo, pursuing education at school and university, pursuing my dream job, beholding the ocean, flying in an aircraft, singing, dancing, and truly living.

I was born in a place, nurtured by the warmth of a fireplace, and unknowingly became a casualty of the conflict that ravaged my





“ As a 21 years old Afghan girl, I have come to the below conclusion based on my live experience:

In Afghanistan, people can be divided into four groups based on how they view and treat their daughters' rights.

1. Open-minded: Fully support daughters' rights and equality with sons.
2. Moderate: Support some rights, but impose some restrictions due to societal pressure.
3. Mixed: Varying levels of support and restrictions, influenced by generational differences.
4. Traditional: Prefer sons and view daughters as burdens, limiting their education and opportunities.

Each group's approach to daughters' rights significantly impacts their lives, affecting their confidence, independence, and overall well-being. The girls in our country are incredibly resilient and strong, continuing to fight for their rights despite all odds. They persist in their education, even if it means studying online. Amidst the historical struggles and deprivations, they've faced, there remains a glimmer of hope, as they've grown stronger over time. These brave girls have raised their voices within their families, demanding their rights, and around fifty percent of families have evolved, now supporting their daughters' rights and treating them well. Although the situation remains challenging and painful, the resilience and determination of these girls are unwavering. There is a strong belief that their persistent efforts will lead to success and prove their capabilities, inshaAllah!

**- Zarifa Sherzoi**

“ After passing the Kankor exam, I pursued my dream of studying engineering at Kabul Polytechnic University, a field I had chosen in the 7th grade. Everything went well until the regime changed, and the Taliban took power. I faced even more difficulties, and we were deprived of many things. However, I managed to complete my thesis when universities reopened for a brief period of 6 months. As the youngest child with retired parents, I felt a responsibility to find work,

but I struggled to do so. As a recent graduate, I often pondered the challenges I faced in finding a job and realized the even greater barriers that women encounter in the field of engineering. This realization led me to establish the Society of Afghan Women Engineers . When I shared this concept with my friends and other engineers, I received overwhelming support from all of them, which further motivated me to work harder. This organization is not only a reflection of my aspirations but also a platform to support female engineers across Afghanistan. My greatest wish is to provide opportunities for girls who dream of pursuing careers in engineering, empowering them to realize their full potential and contribute meaningfully to society.

**- Sahar Mahmood**



**THE END**