YOUTH LEADERS: VITAL TO COUNTERING VIOLENCE AND EXTREMISM

The U.S. Institute of Peace gathered 31 youth leaders from countries confronting violent conflict at a meeting with His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama in Dharamsala, India, in October 2018, where he encouraged them to sustain their efforts to build peace in their homelands.

This third annual dialogue is a partnership between USIP and the Dalai Lama, a global voice for peace and 1989 Nobel Peace Prize laureate. The project aims to strengthen the abilities of young people working to build peace in the world’s most violent regions. This year’s group of leaders came from 12 countries, including Syria, Afghanistan, Colombia and Nigeria.

Who are the youth leaders?

“These youth leaders are peacebuilders who are determined and passionate about ending the violence that plagues their countries,” said USIP President Nancy Lindborg, who joined the youth at the Dalai Lama’s compound. “They are the key to a more peaceful future, and these dialogues help strengthen their resolve and ability to continue this difficult work.”

“From killing fields, from tragic situations, come all these incredible people. It gives me hope,” the Dalai Lama said of the youth peacebuilders he met in the initial dialogue in 2016.

What do youth leaders gain from this experience?

The youth exchange in Dharamsala included discussions on ways to advance their peacebuilding work. Participants become USIP Generation Change Fellows, a program which partners with young leaders across the globe to foster collaboration, build resilience and strengthen capacity as they transform local communities.
**What is the Dalai Lama’s role?**

The Dalai Lama is one of the world’s most recognized and respected peace advocates. He is both a spiritual leader within and beyond his Buddhist community, and a long-experienced, hands-on practitioner of conflict resolution. At his residence in Dharamsala, India, the Dalai Lama spent two days conferring with USIP’s youth leaders, offering practical guidance for their struggles against violence, prejudice and extremism while providing the inspiration to help these leaders stay resilient in their pursuit of peace amid violent conflict in their countries. For many, the opportunity to gather with peers from across the globe is an unprecedented source of shared knowledge, inspiration and strength to bolster and renew their own work. The youth also are able to seek the Dalai Lama’s counsel on specific challenges they face. Through the Generation Change Fellows program training, the project develops the youth leaders’ conflict management, leadership and prejudice awareness and reduction skills while expanding their ability to work across religious and cultural communities. Participants in the program report that they have returned home with both concrete ideas and personal inspiration that has served their peacebuilding efforts at home.

**Outreach Beyond Dharamsala**

The USIP Youth Leaders’ Exchange with the Dalai Lama has had extraordinary reach, with a potential audience exceeding tens of millions around the globe. Live coverage of the Dalai Lama’s meetings with the youth leaders reached nearly 900,000 views while engagement on Facebook and Twitter reached hundreds of thousands more. Al Jazeera English hosted an interactive panel discussion with the Dalai Lama and the youth leaders on “The Stream,” which explored ways that people can transform personal loss from conflict into post-traumatic growth for themselves and their communities.

**Youth Leaders Working for Peace**

In its first three years, the USIP young leaders’ conferences with the Dalai Lama have drawn over eighty participants from 175 countries grappling with violent conflict. Their work can help bring about sustainable peace in the most pernicious conflicts.