



DR AHMAD SARMAST

IS MUSIC A LUXURY IN A POST CONFLICT COUNTRY SUCH  
AS AFGHANISTAN?

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In his keynote speech, Dr Sarmast patiently described the tragic fate of the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of Afghanistan in the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, set up the context and ambience for the key question of his speech whether music is a luxury or a necessity in a country such as his nation where music was entirely banned for several years.

Based on the path and programs of the Afghanistan National Institute of Music (ANIM), which he founded in 2010, Dr Sarmast argued strongly that in country like Afghanistan with many social and political challenges, music is not only a luxury but a necessity and a powerful force for transforming lives, communities and an alterative to radicalism and extremism.

ANIM is Afghanistan's first institute of music where talented children, regardless of their gender, ethnicity, or socio-economic background are trained in Afghan traditional and Western classical music while obtaining a high quality academic and core education. ANIM has a special focus on supporting the most disadvantaged group in Afghan society – the orphans

and street working kids to attain a vocation that will allow them to reach their full potential, while contributing to their social and economic status as well as their emotional healing. Integral to our music program is a high quality academic education ensuring that our students are able to achieve at the highest level nationally and internationally as musicians, music educators, academics and specialists. ANIM is committed to providing a dynamic, challenging and safe learning environment for all students. Through the provision of an internationally-accredited curriculum our graduates will have the skills, creative vision and confidence to contribute to the artistic, social and cultural life of Afghanistan, and the rebuilding and revival of Afghan music traditions.

ANIM is acknowledged as the institution which brought music back into the community and ensured the musical rights of Afghan people. During Taliban time, the people of Afghanistan were deprived of their basic human rights and musical rights, including not having access to music education, to musical recordings, being denied their rights to listen to music and any rights to learn and/or play an instrument.

With the inauguration of ANIM in 2010, music was firmly reintroduced into Afghan society and soon thereafter to be recognised as an invaluable tool in rebuilding a nation. ANIM is the only institution in Afghanistan ensuring the musical rights of people and utilising the soft power of music for transforming lives, communities, and facilitating in the ethnic and intercultural dialogue within Afghanistan and internationally. The following objectives are the cornerstones to ANIM's mission and significantly important for establishing a pluralistic and inclusive society:

- Transforming lives through music and education
- Empowerment of girls and promote gender equality
- Promote musical diversity and healing of the nation
- Community outreach and social impact
- Ensure the musical rights of Afghan children
- Engage in cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue
- Revive Afghan musical traditions

ANIM's holistic approach and commitment towards the aforementioned values have put this unique institution in conflict with the Taliban and Daesh ideology. Despite the ongoing threats and the 2013 suicide bombing attack on ANIM performance, and given the sensitivity of ANIM programs in the midst of a conflict zone, where staunch enemies of music and social inclusion are still present and active, ANIM strongly upholds values important for establishing a just and pluralistic society. The commitment and bravery of ANIM community in the face of these threats has been

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### **Achievements**

From its inception to its present state in 2018, ANIM has made significant achievements in many areas. Year by year, the ANIM student community has grown exponentially. In 2010, ANIM began with 100 students and has since increased that number to over 250, with 80% of these students coming from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. ANIM is a strong promoter of gender equality and is highly committed to the empowerment of girls through education and music. In 2010 ANIM began with just one female student and has since increased that number to 65. Ethnic diversity at ANIM has also increased since 2010 through its partnership with local orphanages and organizations including the Afghan Child Education and Care Organization (AFCECO), Aschiana, and Save the Children, and currently ANIM has enrolled students from a wide range of provinces including Bamiyan, Farah, Ghazni, Panjshir, Kunar, Takhar, Nangarhar, and Nuristan.

ANIM has developed an infrastructure that includes a collection of both traditional and Western classical musical instruments, sound-proofed practice rooms, an instrument repair, computer lab, well-stocked music library, instrument storage, and a large rehearsal building boasting twenty (20) individual practice rooms. These facilities will be joined in the near future by a concert hall and a residence hall for 200 girls, which is set to open in Winter 2018.

Since 2010, ANIM has employed a team of expatriate faculty members who work with students, lead academic music courses, and train local teachers in music and music pedagogy while contributing to the development of ANIM's curriculum and programs including the development of Afghanistan's leading ensembles.

ANIM carries its message to the international community through participation in tours, music festivals, scholarship exchange programs and competitions outside of Afghanistan. The growth and progress of ANIM's programs continues to generate international interest and acclaim by showing a new face of Afghanistan: one of positive social changes, freedom of expression, and intercultural dialog. Each year, many opportunities are given to ANIM for international cultural diplomacy initiatives in countries worldwide. Highlights from previous years include festivals, workshops, and tours to Argentina, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Poland, South Korea, Turkmenistan, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan, the United Kingdom, and India. Three large-scale orchestral tours to the United States in February 2013 (funded by the US Embassy and the US State Department), Muscat, Oman in February 2014, and a multi-city tour to Germany and Switzerland, with Afghanistan's first female-ensemble, Zohra Orchestra, debuting at the closing ceremony of the 2017 World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland have contributed greatly to ANIM's success, international recognition, and internal development.

A recipient of many awards, recognitions and accolades since its inception, ANIM is a proud member of Hundr(ED) Global, as one of the top 100 Global inspiring and innovative educational institutions. In 2017, ANIM and Zohra Orchestra were awarded the Freemuse Prize and most recently in 2018, Dr. Sarmast and the Afghanistan National Institute of Music have been named among the laureates of the Polar Music Prize, also known as the Nobel Prize for Music.