

THE NEW STAR

independent student newspaper

ISSUE 6

MARCH 10, 2026



WOMEN
WHO
CHANGED
THE WORLD



NGA
STUDENT
STORY



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WOMEN'S DAY, RESILIENCE, AND RAISING OUR VOICES: AFGHAN AND CENTRAL ASIAN WOMEN

Every year on International Women's Day, the world celebrates the achievements, strength, and courage of women. Yet for many women in Afghanistan and Central Asia, this day is not only a celebration—it is a reminder of ongoing struggle and extraordinary resilience. In Afghanistan, under the rule of the Taliban, women face some of the most severe restrictions in the world. Girls are banned from secondary schools and universities, women are limited in employment, and new legal frameworks have weakened protections against domestic violence. Despite these conditions, Afghan women continue to resist. Some teach girls in secret classrooms. Others speak out from exile, documenting abuses and advocating globally. Their resilience is not loud, but it is powerful. It lives in hidden books, whispered lessons, and quiet acts of defiance. Across Central Asia in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan, women also navigate challenges rooted in patriarchy, economic inequality, and gender-based violence. While they may not face the same level of state-imposed exclusion as Afghan women, they confront wage gaps, domestic violence, social pressure, and underrepresentation in leadership. Yet Central Asian women lead civil society organizations, run businesses, pursue higher education, and advocate for stronger legal protections. International Women's Day should not only honor these women, but it should also amplify them. Being their voice does not mean speaking over them; it means creating platforms where their words can be heard. It means supporting women-led organizations, promoting access to education, defending legal protections, and challenging harmful narratives that justify inequality. The resilience of Afghan and Central Asian women shows that rights can be restricted, but determination cannot be erased. Their courage is shaping the region's future. Empowering them is not simply a moral responsibility; it is an economic and political necessity. When women are educated, protected, and included, economies grow, communities stabilize, and societies become stronger. On Women's Day and beyond, raising our voices for them is an act of solidarity. When women rise, nations rise with them.

Hafasa Yousufzai
Alumni-125



FOUND, AFTER LOST

As an energetic youngster, day and night, I was searching for my hero in the books. I crossed The story of Spartacus in the ancient Roman Empire to Martin Luther King Jr. in modern USA. I dived into the bibliography of Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, the biography of Alexander the Great, and Genghis Khan. I learned from their stories and expanded my horizon. Some of them emerged as my heroes and an example to be followed, but with all due respect, none of them remained my hero for a long time. Many things and events in life come unexpectedly, and for me, I found my real hero much later, when I lost her, my mother. For all those years that I was searching for a hero, I never realized that it was her all along, and maybe it is in the nature of human beings that when they lose someone, they realize the value of someone.

I am currently a DAAD scholar researching in Germany and a proud alumnus of AUCA. It may seem ordinary, but looking back on my life, it seems extraordinary. Not long before the year 2000, I was born in a family with an unstable economic situation in the central highlands of Afghanistan with a fragile educational system. It was not a hard decision for families to send their children to Iran for work or replace their education with farm and house assistance. Despite illiteracy, for my mother, education was a number one priority. In addition to housework, she was sewing handicrafts to accommodate my education the best she could. For her, it was very important that I should always have the best bag, new notebooks, and books. She praised my educational achievements and supported me in times of failure. She always spoke of me proudly in the circle of her friends. She was the one who was enjoying listening when I was reading something loud, she even paid extra attention to my handwriting works and treated them as if they are piece of a holy book. The support my mother gave me was the foundation for my later success. She paved the way and supported me so I could overcome the challenges one by one and find my way to higher education. Until her death in 2020, I rarely noticed her sacrifices, but after I lost her, I figured out how important the vision, deep understanding, and great courage were. In a community where the state is not a source of support but a source of discrimination, geography is not a source of economic thriving, but deprivation, she rightly concluded that education is the way to recognition and prosperity.

Despite chronic illness, having no expectations from anyone, she sacrificed her life for my education and the whole family. Much later, I figure out that our heroes are much closer to us than we realize, and I figure out that our heroes are those who not only give life but also a way of living. My mother's voice still rings in me: "I support you, and I hope one day you could support more people". It seems simple, but it is a way of life. Although I lost my mother, part of her always lives in me, and her way of life always guides me. I do not see this piece as something that can be connecting, but it is what I feel for my mother and my hero. It may suggest that we should think twice before looking for other heroes.

To all women,

To my Hero.

Happy Women's Day!

Farhad Ehsani
AUCA Alumni, DAAD scholar

In the Silent Blue



I wish again,
and in the silent dark of the night
I search for new colors.

I ask again:
If the silent solitude of the night did not exist,
Where would I find my own quiet?

Sorrow is good.
Sorrow is familiar.
It is in these hours of darkness
that I learn its true name.

My hair is still
in the restless embrace of the autumn wind,
and the moonlight that comes
from the midnight of my father's house
is still beautiful
on this side of the ocean.

Sorrow is thinking of you.
Sorrow is watching birds in flight
in solitude.
It is the serene blue of the sky,
the silent wandering of white clouds.

In the quiet, I search for color,
and in sorrow I find you—
knowing that somewhere in this world
You long for me,
and not knowing
In what corner of time
I will finally find your embrace.

Until then,
the night remains,
the wind remains,
the ocean remains—
and in their silence,
I remain with my sorrow,
which is also my hope.

Maryam Hussiani
ICP-121



Voices Against Silence: WOMEN WHO CHANGE THE WORLD FROM PAGE, STAGE, AND HISTORY

Is it possible to have a significant influence on society while being among those who are usually not listened to? Throughout history, women were oppressed by men just because of one feature – gender. They did not have access to those basic rights that an ordinary teenage boy of those days was enjoying, such as the right to education, the vote, and property. Similarly, books were mainly about the heroism of male characters and the silence of female ones. However, despite this oppression, there are outstanding female figures at whom we look with inspiration and a sense of pride. Their stories serve as a reminder to all of humanity that every person is able to do anything he or she wants, despite his or her gender.

Let's pay attention to the female contribution to science, without which a huge number of modern inventions would not have existed. No one can stay indifferent to the example of **Marie Curie**, who has done research on radioactivity and became the first woman to win a Nobel Prize and the first person to win this prize in two different fields. A quote of her "Nothing in life is to be feared; it is only to be understood," reminds us that every person is able to do great things; it is just a matter of patience, understanding, and time. **Hedy Lamarr**, who, despite her Hollywood career, spent her time inventing different systems and mechanisms. She developed a system that later became the technological basis for Wi-Fi, Bluetooth, and GPS, without which we cannot imagine our lives nowadays. **Valentina Tereshkova** made history in 1963 by becoming the first woman to travel to space. Her achievement became a turning point in the STEM field that challenged stereotypes about women's abilities and knowledge.

Another important point to consider is that women are great warriors. They show resistance not only in times of war when it is essential to stay strong, but in times of peace as well, by guiding nations to the right way. The most fascinating example is **Joan of Arc**, who played a crucial role in the Hundred Years' War. Despite being a young peasant with no military training, she led French troops to important victories and helped restore national morale. Joan's fate made her an eternal symbol of bravery and courage, which remains an inspiration for women throughout generations, reminding us not to step out for the sake of truth and liberty. **Farah Pahlavi**, the last Empress of Iran, played a major role in promoting education, cultural institutions, and women's advancement in Iranian society. She supported museums, universities, and social initiatives aimed at expanding educational opportunities and strengthening Iranian cultural heritage. **Rosa Parks** became a central figure in the American Civil Rights Movement when she refused to give up her seat on the bus in 1955. Her quiet act of defiance wrote a new chapter in the history that has put an end to segregation and made another step towards the path of human rights.

"You must never be fearful about what you are doing when it is right" – let this quote be a note for us that it is important to speak out against the regime in order to achieve equality. **Princess Diana** changed the global understanding of royalty by dedicating herself to helping those who were suffering from humanitarian crises. Her sympathy and willingness to engage directly with marginalized communities helped reduce stigma and inspired global charitable work. "Carry out a random act of kindness, with no expectation of reward" - her empathetic mindset and character made her a queen of hearts whose position is eternal in their minds.

Last but not least, female writers and characters from movies and books who became our role models since childhood, and affect the way we look at things in life. **Agatha Christie** is a genius in the field of detective novels whose works captivate from the first page and leave no reader indifferent. Her intricate plots and unforgettable characters, such as Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple, transformed crime fiction into one of the most popular literary genres worldwide. **Mary Shelley** revolutionized literature with Frankenstein, a novel that helped establish the genre of science fiction. She proved not only to her community but to the whole world that women can be great writers and there are no boundaries except for those that one has inside their mind. **Hermione Granger** from the Harry Potter series demonstrates intellectual curiosity and moral courage. She is the symbol of discipline, hard work, and determination who has gone through many challenges to defeat injustice and make the world peaceful and fair. **Elle Woods** from Legally Blonde is a fabulous character who challenges stereotypes about appearance and intelligence. Initially underestimated, she proves her abilities by succeeding at Harvard Law School and becomes a capable lawyer. Her story gives hope and strength to millions of girls worldwide to trust their abilities and fight for what they want. "It is with passion, courage, and conviction, and a strong sense of self that we take our next steps into the world, remembering that first impressions are not always correct. You must always have faith in people. And most importantly, you must always have faith in yourself."

Let these examples be a reminder to humanity to treat people equally and not forget the huge amount of work that has been done through many centuries in order to achieve the point of development that people have now. Dear ladies, remember that you are exceptional, beautiful, and smart – just because your stories are not written yet, it does not mean they are not worth reading. You all are unique and exceptional, and it is important to remind yourself of this, so you do not lose the spark in your eyes and keep shining.

MY JOURNEY TO THE NEW GENERATION ACADEMY



I am 19 years old, and I am from the Talas region, where the famous writer Chyngyz Aitmatov was born. When I was in the 10th grade at school, I came to the American University of Central Asia (AUCA) on an excursion with my teachers and classmates. We were all very surprised, and I was especially impressed. The university seemed very large and modern, and I had heard a lot about it before. During the visit, Adina Sulumbekova shared a lot of crucial information about AUCA and the New Generation Academy (NGA) program. After listening to her, I set a goal for myself to apply to the NGA program.

I am also from Talas, just like Adina Sulumbekova, who studied and graduated from the New Generation Academy. She once told us about this program and explained what kinds of opportunities it could open for students. At that moment, I felt inspired and motivated, and I decided that if possible, I would apply to this program as well. When I reached the 11th grade, I began preparing for the National Republican Test. I studied day and night. Unfortunately, I did not have the opportunity to attend expensive courses in the city because my parents did not have highly paid jobs, and I did not want to put extra pressure on them. Because of this, I relied on my own efforts. I studied independently and spent a lot of time thinking about my future. I understood that I needed to work hard in order to enter a scholarship program. When my parents heard that I had been accepted into the scholarship program, they were very happy and proud. They had great hopes for me. Our studies began in the middle of August, but during the first semester, I struggled a lot to adapt. I grew up in a village in a Kyrgyz-speaking environment where everyone around me spoke Kyrgyz. When I came here, the education system felt very different. Many people communicate in Russian, and many things were unfamiliar to me. It was sometimes difficult to communicate with new people, and at times I even behaved a bit coldly toward others. During that time, I was going through a difficult period. I often felt confused and sometimes wanted to cry, but I did not show this to others. Instead, I tried to focus on my studies and worked hard academically. At first, I could not understand what our American professors were saying, but after practicing and listening more, I gradually got used to it.

Gulnazik Sharshenova



AUCA HANDCRAFTING CLUB



What is art for you? Art, in the broadest sense, is the act of creating. It is imagination taking shape through our hands. But for me, art has always meant something more personal. It is a quiet refuge after stressful days, a moment to nourish the soul, slow down, and immerse myself in a sense of peace.

The AUCA Handcrafting Club was created during my NGA year. At the time, my main motivation was that I wanted to keep practicing my favorite hobby—embroidery. What started as a small gathering around threads and needles slowly transformed into something much bigger. Over the past three years, the club has grown into a vibrant community that practises many forms of handcrafting such as sewing, knitting, embroidery, drawing, vision board creation, and many other creative activities. Each meeting is designed to give students a pause from the intense rhythm of academic life. We have a chance to step away from deadlines and assignments, and let our thoughts flow with the current of creativity. A major turning point for our club came when we began working with the support of the Academic Advising Center. Their encouragement allowed us to expand our ideas and organize sessions of different formats and sizes. Our art sessions now take place once a month and are open to all AUCA students. What once began as a small initiative has grown into a community of more than 100 participants — and the number continues to grow with every session.

Collaboration has also become an important part of our journey. We regularly partner with other student clubs and local stationery stores to bring new experiences to our members. In February, for example, we held a joint creative session with the Hobby Park stationery store, where more than 80-90 participants came together to create, connect, and share inspiration. Looking back, it is incredible to see how a simple wish to continue a personal hobby turned into a space where so many students can relax, express themselves, and rediscover the joy of creating with their own hands. Because sometimes, in the middle of busy university life, all we need is a moment of creativity to remind us how beautiful it is simply to make something

Sezim Turdumambetova
LAS-HR-124

MY JOURNEY TO THE NEW GENERATION ACADEMY

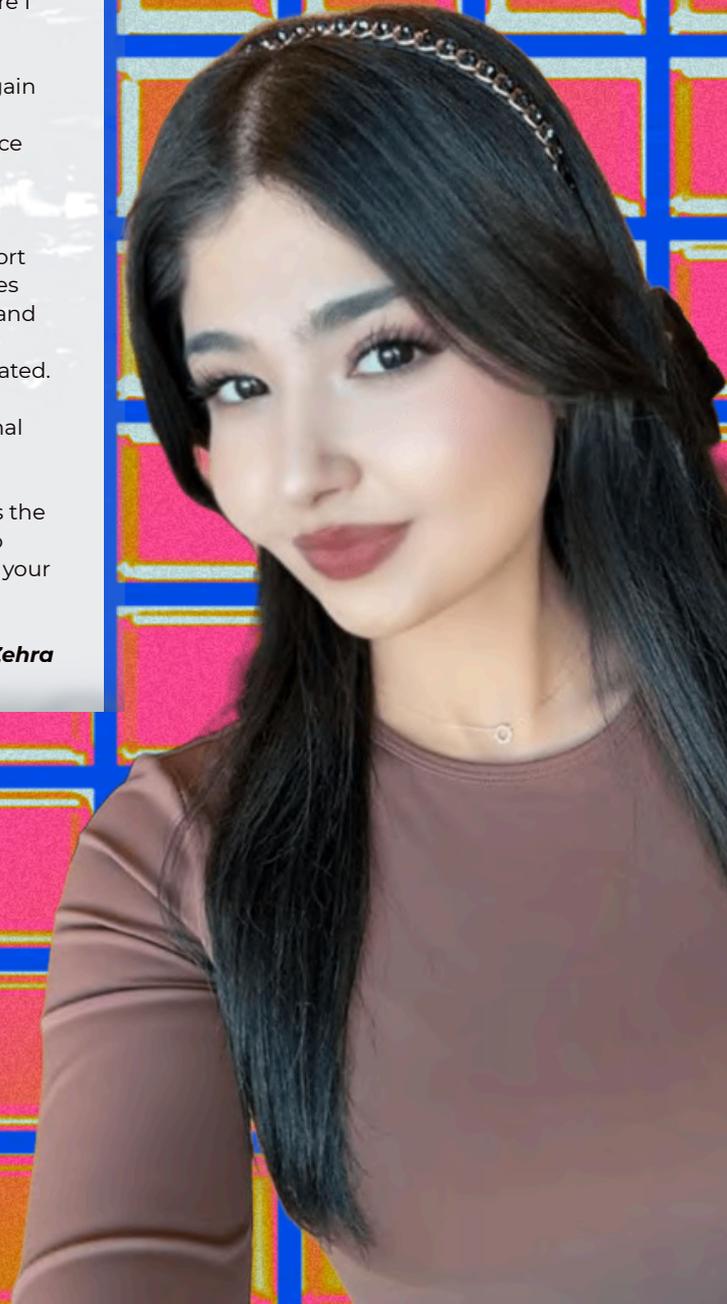
I am 18 years old, and I was born and raised in Bishkek. From an early age, I have always been interested in education and in the opportunities that open up for people who are eager to grow and learn.

I first heard about the American University of Central Asia from my mother when I was about ten years old. She spoke about the university with great respect, which made me curious to learn more about it. Over time, I began searching for information on my own, reading about its programs and student life. At that time, it was simply a childhood dream, but it was the moment when I first imagined myself as a student there. As I grew older, my plans began to change. Due to family circumstances, it was expected that I would continue my studies in Turkey. I prepared seriously for this step I took exams, gathered my documents, and was ready to begin a new stage of my life in another country. However, on the very day when I was supposed to leave, I realized that I needed to make this decision myself. I understood that education is not only about opportunities, but also about choosing a path that truly feels right. I wanted to study in an environment where I could feel inspired, motivated, and eager to grow. For this reason, I decided to stay and apply to the New Generation Academy. This decision became a new beginning for me. I was ready to prepare again for the entrance exams and go through the admission process. Eventually, I was accepted into the NGA program, and this experience has been very valuable for me.

The learning process here is dynamic and engaging. The teachers explain complex ideas in a clear and understandable way and support students throughout their studies. Because of this, learning becomes not just a responsibility but also an opportunity to constantly grow and discover new ideas. However, what impressed me the most was the atmosphere. The people here are open-minded, friendly, and motivated. Students support one another, easily connect with each other, and create an environment where learning, communication, and personal growth feel natural.

Today, I realize that my decision to stay and follow my own path was the right one. Sometimes the most important step is simply listening to yourself and not being afraid to choose the path that truly feels like your own.

Lel Fatima Zehra



FAREWELL Kiss to Aigerim



The curly girl always confidently walks on the campus with matcha in one of her hands. Despite this drink, you can also notice that she always dresses stylishly. It looks like art and absolute naturalness at the same time. But the main thing is her facial expressions. When you talk with her, you feel alive. She can be contagiously laughing one moment, sincerely sad and deep in the next, and then suddenly smiling so warmly that you couldn't help but grin back. She acted in such a way in daily life; however, she's no worse on stage. Yes, if you have already guessed, this person is Aigerim. The senior student of the department of Psychology and the artist of Theatre Mirrors.

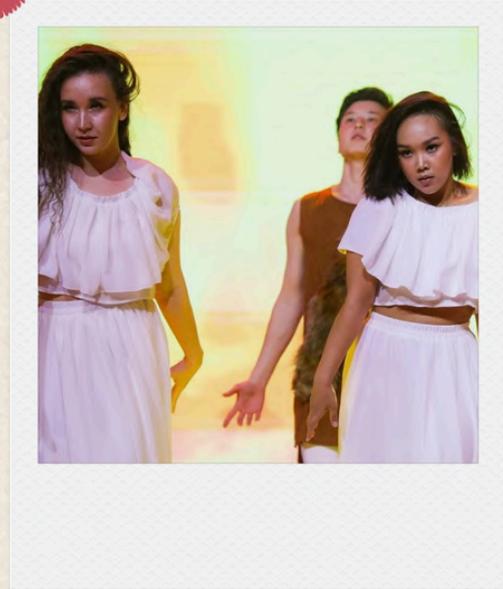
But behind this bright exterior lies a story that she hesitated to tell for a long time.

She really wanted to go to AUCA. It was not just a university, but a goal to achieve. She chose the department herself, went through the whole hell of admission and Orientation Week, on her own. But life is an ironic thing. At the very beginning of the semester, she had to leave for three weeks. It would seem like a small thing. But when she returned, everything was different. Her friends from Orientation Week drifted away, the jokes became internal, and connections began. She went to lessons beautifully dressed, with perfect posture, but inside, it was empty. The professors seemed like strangers; there were no friends, and there was zero activity. The first semester was a real identity crisis for her. A girl who has been a soloist in an ensemble for 14 years is used to the stage, to hard work, and to the status of an excellent student. And suddenly she feels "not good enough." It's painful. She's used to being strong, but here comes the disappointment. First of all, on herself. In the second semester, she tried to "wake up." She performed at Diversity Week and felt the stage under her feet again. On this wave, she submitted an application for the Stream competition from the Mirrors Theater. She performed two numbers: a native folk dance and jazz. On her own. Without anyone's help. "I didn't even know how to dance jazz! It was very hard for me, but I couldn't ask for help," – remembered Aigerim. Because for her, asking for help meant admitting weakness. "If I don't do it all by myself, it means I didn't make anything," she thought then, frowning at the mirror in the rehearsal room. When the winners were announced, she stood and waited. Silence.

It was a crash. That same summer, she began collecting documents for Italy. She was sure that AUCA was not her place; she was not needed here. She stepped into her sophomore year with thoughts: "This is my last year here, so there's nothing to lose." Firstly, she started talking in pairs, even if she didn't know the answer. And then there was a turning point – preparation for Initiation. She didn't want to go, but suddenly she got a message from Diana, one of the supervisors of the theatre. A photo from the rehearsal and the question: "Where are you?" There was everything in this simple question. They were waiting for her. She was noticed. Then there was the fourth semester and the Stream again. She didn't even think about participating until Nikolai Grigorievich asked her about the reasons. Aigerim explained that she will transfer to another university. Thinking that he understood her, she waited for his answer. This short question is "So what?" turned her world upside down. Really, so what? Why not try one last time? This time, she acted differently. She threw away her pride and did what she was most afraid of. She asked for help. She came to Altyna, a girl from the hip-hop world, which was completely alien to her. Together, they have created something incredible. It was not a "good girl-excellent student" dance, but a dance-the destruction of stereotypes. It was a break with her old self.

"I'm different. And I'm better," she went on stage with that thought. And she won.

She's in her fourth year today. She writes her diploma, laughs in the corridors, and still dresses brightly. But if you ask her why she loves Mirrors Theater, she won't say "for dancing" or "for winning." She'll say, "For the people." For Nikolay Grigorievich, Diana, Bema, and Adelia. For those who became her family and helped her not to run away from herself. This is a story about how one "So what?" can be stronger than all fears and make you fall in love with your life all over again.



*Nazbike Turgunaliyeva
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A LETTER FROM THE HEART

I first saw Aigerim through a computer screen when she applied for a Stream scholarship competition. She instantly fell into my soul. It was immediately clear that she was the contest winner. It's been a long time since we've had someone like her in our team. I was particularly impressed by the fact that she was a folk dancer. I think she knows that! As it turned out later, Aigerim not only dances beautifully, but also sings, speaks several languages, knows how to host events, and instantly learns new things. There are few such multifaceted people like her. And I'm sure there are many other talents hidden in her. In addition to being creative, Aigerim is also an excellent student. I do not know what her GPA is. But I know for sure that she is responsible and will definitely bring everything to the end, even if the deadline is 30 minutes away, and she has nothing ready, she will squeeze herself out and do the job well. She has a desire for knowledge and the ability to achieve her goals. There is a stylish Aigerim. Each of her outfits is thought out to the smallest detail. I think everyone notices that. Attention to detail is a great trait. Keep it up, Aigerim. Another thing I've noticed over the years of working with her is the clear boundaries she sets. She knows what she likes, what needs to be done, what not to do, when to speak, and when it is better to remain silent. In short, she's smart beyond her years. Our office and I, in particular, will miss her very much. It is always sad to part with such sincere, intelligent, well-mannered, and talented students. Aigerim has given so much to our university in such a short period of time. Thank you, Aigerim, for your smile, voice, work, and professionalism. I am sure that you have a great and bright future. Unleash your potential; you have unlimited potential. Don't forget StudLife. We are always waiting for you to visit. I love, appreciate, and respect you very much.

Hug you.

*Diana Takutdinova
Student Life Office*



Позиция авторов статей не всегда совпадает с позицией ред. коллегии в целом.

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