

Hi my familiar and unfamiliar friend,

I'm Mariana. I write to you from a country where you've never been, but I'm hopeful that when you read my letter you'd like to see me and my country, as I'd like to know you and how you're doing, my so familiar and unfamiliar friend.

This letter, addressed to you, is an opportunity to break the stereotype that it's impossible to get in touch with citizens of your country, and moreover, talk about peace: the greatest issue of our times.

You know, peace is what a child dreams of, not even realizing it, and wishes peace for the whole world, unaware of notions of animosity and hatred which are unfamiliar to their childish, pure mind.

Let us see, I don't say "me" and "you," but "us" to create our future. Let's put aside the words "hatred" and "enemy," and use "darling" and "friends" instead.

I have my own thoughts and viewpoints about peace. So, peace is not a term for me that one can define and move forward. While contemplating this issue, I realized that peace can be understood in many ways, and what's important is that all manifestations of peace are interconnected. If your country is at peace, you're peaceful too; peaceful is your soul and the sky. Doesn't it feel good to have inner peace? And how good it is when the country is at peace? For me, peace has colors, too. For instance, war is characterized with inherent grey colors – darkness, clouds of dust, blood – while peace is associated with whiteness, a blue sky, bright sun and a smile. I hope you agree with me.

You know, I've always wondered what you, and your friends and relatives, think about this, and how you see the way to peace.

I've not had the opportunity to visit your country, to talk to people and listen to their opinions, but I believe that a person with a healthy mind – a member of the society, a citizen of a state – wants to see his or her country in peace, and two nations that live peacefully on earth under the same one sky.

Now I'll tell you a story in which our nations lived at peace. You'll see that being in peace is hidden inside us, and the many "buts" that exist between us need to be erased.

Together with her parents, my Grandmother lived in Shamkir, Azerbaijan for 20 years, until she got married and came to Armenia. Her parents moved in 1992 during the movement. Grandma says that her great-grandparents lived there, too, and they never thought they would have to leave that place. Our nations lived so peacefully that they didn't even lock the doors because of the trust between them. My grandma's father's friends were mostly Azerbaijanis and one of them, Mahar, was so close that they called him "dayi."

You know, my Grandma's dream is to see her parental home after so many years, and if she doesn't manage to do so, she has delegated it to her grandchildren.

I believe the circumstances were strong and inflamed a fire of hostility exacerbating the paths leading to war. But it's our turn now, people like me and you, so we stand stronger than those circumstances. Imagine how great it will be if you visit my country; I'll show you the places you're looking for, and you'll show my grandma's house to me. We'll remember these letters together and realize how much has changed. We'll laugh at our letters wholeheartedly even if it happens 10 or 20 years later. We'll spread light on people – on the dark corners of their aching souls – and infect them with our optimism and sound judgments, and be the best example for them.

I'd also like to mention that I study at Yerevan State University, Faculty of Armenian Philology, so based on my profession just want to say that the word peace – «խաղաղություն» in Armenian is a simple derivative word, but it conveys noble notions, bringing a human close to perfection, purification – catharsis.

I don't know what you'll feel when you read my letter but I'd love you to share with me. Sorry for being so long, just couldn't cut it short. My letter is a small call for humanism.

P.S. My steps are small but bold.

With love,

Mariana