Massoud Hossaini's Pulitzer-winning photo: after the world stops looking

"Hard-working Afghan photographer wins Pulitzer" – that's the general headline the international press ran with last week as Massoud Hossaini's photograph, the girl in green, won the Pulitzer prize. In the days that followed, the photo would be widely republished; Hossaini himself became the subject of interviews and articles focusing on the events that took place the day he took this powerful photograph, in the immediate aftermath of a suicide bombing during a religious celebration at a holy shrine in Kabul.

Many view this Pulitzer as a welcome change from the usual routine of western journalists being honoured for their work abroad; Massoud's story was presented as a photographer covering a war and a struggle in his own country, in an effort to let the world see what is happening there. I met him last week and he described his thoughts just minutes after being wounded by the explosion: "I was in shock but I also thought I had to cover that moment. To cover that pain and all those scared faces, to show it to the world … If I show this, I help those people in some way because the world will know their pain."

As Hossaini is on the receiving end of a flood of well-deserved attention, it might seem like a concern for what is taking place in Afghanistan has been reignited. But what follows the interviews and reprintings of this sad picture? Has the international community really heard the message Hossaini and many like him are try to communicate to their audience? As we post and share "the girl in green" on Facebook walls

and tweet links to the picture , are we really receiving the message?

The BBC and AFP are among scores of news sources to have run interviews with Massoud, editing down his words to a compact digestible size. They focused on the horror of experiencing a suicide bombing, the modest bravery of continuing to work despite injury and shock, and his personal mission: to show the world what is happening without pulling any punches or giving in to the calls to hide so-called graphic content. All these themes are important, but they are never followed by an open discussion about finding long-term solutions. But that's just the type of media coverage Hossaini would like to see: "I can't accept that the nations of the world who have peace at home and stable economies don't know what is happening in Afghanistan. It shouldn't be like that. Afghanistan is not on some other planet. We all live together on earth and whatever pain Afghanistan experiences has or will have an impact on the rest of world."

During the World Press Photo award ceremony last week, which was held in the Netherlands, the audience looked on as Hossaini presented a collection of his photos. Most of them were of military activity, suicide bombings, and the struggles of daily life. The audience looked on captivated, offering a round of applause in appreciation of the photographs and the person who took them. Minutes later, they spilled out onto the streets of festive Amsterdam, having drinks and making dinner plans – not that attendees shouldn't do such a thing, but it illustrates our world's strange juxtapositions.

Back in Afghanistan, the drawdown of international co-operation continues. Education and development organisations have reduced their activity in the country, as budgets have dried up and security concerns abound. By 2014 military forces will be withdrawn, a decision people in the US and Europe seem very much in favour of. The feeling is thus: "We've done our part, and it has been declared a lost cause."

Afghanistan is assumed to be a place from which there are only horror stories to relay. Positive events rarely make it to the international stage, and we don't ask about the areas where life is actually improving. It is this other reality that Hossaini also wishes the world would notice: "It is true that Afghanistan is in a bad situation and there is conflict, but it doesn't mean we don't have good things going on in the country as well … Plenty of people, especially in the north and centre of the country, are not busy with war; they're busy with starting businesses, getting scholarships, living

life."

We will occasionally stop and look at a photograph, mention it over dinner and maybe give it an award for excellent work. But the idea of staying focused on Afghanistan, despite its problems, doesn't find its way into the public debate any more. Any call for education, infrastructure, or security development initiatives would be condemned immediately; the mere publishing of these words will result in a barrage of angry comments.

But Hossaini has no fear of such condemnation. He lives the reality of today's Afghanistan with the resolve that the world must know, even if it doesn't want to know. He runs towards danger and takes photos when others warn him not to: "I travel throughout Afghanistan, I experience all the different cultures, I talk to people and share ideas to find out what is possible. I want to find a solution for our country. I want to see if there really is a solution for us."

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