

January 31, 2023

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,
Good noon and hallo to everyone.

I sincerely thank LIGA Rhineland Pfalz (federation of the major welfare associations in Rhineland-Palatinate (Red Cross, Caritas, Diakonisches Werk, Arbeiterwohlfahrt and Deutscher Paritätischer Wohlfahrtsverband), for inviting me to speak and share with you my experience.

I would like to focus my speech on 4 areas:

1. My brief introduction
2. Current Situation in Afghanistan
3. Immigration reception in Germany
4. My Recommendations

1. Introduction:

My name is Mohammad Halim Fidai. I was the governor of four provinces in Afghanistan from 2008 till 2021. Before being a governor, I used to work for International aid organizations from 1995 till 2008. A former civil society activist, NGO worker, former president of the South Asia Free Media Association and the founding member of the Afghanistan Independent Journalists Association, having a master degree in International Relations and also a degree in Business Administration. I can speak five languages and nowadays I also learn German language.

I am a two time refugee once when Russian invaded Afghanistan, I migrated to Pakistan and now when the Taliban toppled the elected government I migrated to Germany. I had a vision where the Afghans live within themselves and with the international community in peace and stability, adhere to the universally accepted values and human rights, become an active member of international community and a contributor to the regional and world peace.

Through this vision my fellow Afghans, my children and my future generation will enjoy the same justice, the same right and the same human dignity, that is being enjoyed by any free and civilized country. This was not only my dream, but it was the dream of every Afghan.

I was born in war, studied in war, governed in war, migrated from war – 50 years - this is my life!

2. Current situation in Afghanistan

After the USA and the West abandoned Afghanistan in 1990s, Afghans lost the hope. When 9/11 happened and the Bonn Agreement was signed, UN, EU, USA and NATO returned to Afghanistan and started helping Afghan people, we were hopeful that this time Afghanistan will not become a safe heaven for terrorists and extremists.

From 2001 till August 2021 Afghanistan and the world achieved too much together. Afghanistan become a constitutional country, millions of children including girls were going to schools, people were practicing democracy, human rights, free speech, rule of law, and participation in shaping public policies. One of the most significant achievements were that women and youth were present almost in all spheres of life; from teachers to ministers, from governors, mayors and senators to member of parliament, in civil society, army, police and private sector.

A hope was created and a 20-year old democracy was crawling like a child to reach its adulthood and wisdom.

Unfortunately, under the ill-inked Doha peace deal my and millions of Afghans dreams and hopes were abolished. Now, Afghanistan has basically handed over to the groups who proudly celebrated the suicide bombers; those who killed Afghans, civilians and our international partners.

Afghans are deprived of all their fundamental rights. Hundreds of former security officials, politicians and government officials are killed, jailed, harassed and intimidated on daily bases.

Taliban's general amnesty is just a propaganda and revenge killing is on the rise. Free media is not there and media is badly censored, therefore events are never reported or falsely reported. The Media Free Coalition removed Afghanistan's membership since the Taliban regime is not meeting the commitments and sever sanctions are imposed on Media by Taliban.

Thousand of Afghans, educated individuals, civil society actors, journalists, human rights activists politicians and business actors are leaving the country. As no one feel safe in Afghanistan. Around 5 million people are ready to leave the country.

Afghans make up one of the largest refugee populations worldwide. Millions of people in Afghanistan are experiencing misery and hunger amid decades of conflict, economic collapse, drought, lawlessness, and freezing wintertime temperatures.

Accordingly to UNHCR, 24 million, people in Afghanistan in need of vital humanitarian relief, 3.5 million people internally displaced by conflict in Afghanistan, 2.3 million Afghan refugees and asylum-seekers in neighbouring countries.

Unfortunately, Afghans fleeing the country due to well-founded fears of widespread persecution, torture, revenge killing, and extrajudicial killing, lack of education for their children, hunger, unemployment, extreme poverty under the Taliban and their terrorist affiliates are often denied refugee status in the first, second, and even third countries of asylum.

850000, girls above grade 6 deprived of secondary education. Public and private universities for girls closed and just two days ago the supreme leader of the Taliban issued a decree that no girl will be allowed to enroll in the entry test for the new year.

According to WFP, around 2 million children are facing malnutrition and another 2 million with average malnutrition.

According to John Hopkins University, 81% of the health female workers are threatened by Taliban due to not having a Mahram - mal guardian.

On the 15th of August when Taliban entered Kabul, at around 11 o'clock in the morning, they entered my house in Khushal Khan area of Kabul. I disappeared and was constantly changing my posture, place and routes. I stayed hidden in Kabul till August 24 and during this period, Taliban broke into my house 13 times, threatened my wife and children, forcing them to provide them information about my whereabouts, they took my and my son's private vehicle. Till this moment while talking to you Taliban are illegally and forcefully confiscated my private house and personal property. This is the story of every Afghan.

3. Immigrants reception in Germany

On the night of 25 of August, I was forced to leave my beloved country for Germany with my family. When I arrived to Germany, my family was very warmly welcomed at the Rheinsteine Airport. I took a deep breath after 7 day of travel from Kabul to Qatar and to Germany.

From there upto Trier, Bitburg, Koblenz, Mendig, then Weißenthurm we were treated very nicely and warmly. In the Bitburg temporary facility our documentation process was very smooth and we were provided good accommodation, food, health support. We were transferred to Mayen-Koblentz.

The Coordination of refugee aid of the District administration Mayen-Koblentz received us in Koblenz and guided us towards Mendig. Provided the transportation and needed advice.

In Mendig Mrs Andrea Sesterhenn, from Verbandsgemeinde Mendig Family, schools, order and social affairs offices very quickly and happily completed our registration, provided us further guidance and support. She also introduced us to Mrs Anne Wiederstein from DRK.

Honestly speaking Mrs Wiederstein attitude, support, guidance, technical, cultural, thoroughness and social advice were highly impressive and helpful. Mrs Wiederstein deserved to be recognized and applauded by all of us. She was very accurate, honest and legal while filling out the different application forms for us and her careful, mindful and well organized system of support is really admirable.

Filling out various forms for AOK, bank, children schools, Auslanderbehörde, JobCenter, Familykasse all government and other offices, I never felt that she is annoyed, tired or bored. Such support made my family happy and felt welcoming.

The best quality that the I have noticed in all these refugee and social offices were their integrity, honesty and trust. We did not know the German language, but we still believed that everything goes well. We were like a blind and dumb, but they were our stick and supportive guide.

I avail this opportunity to thank the Ministry of foreign affairs, BAMF, BMI, GiZ, the Mayen Koblenz Kreisverwaltung, Verbandsgemeinde of Mendig and Weißenthurm, Job Center, VHS Andernach, VHS Weißenthurm and VHS Neuwied. I would like to specially thank DRK, Caritas and all those who supported me and my family during our refugee and integration process. The support of the DRK and Carritas and the various councils and their technical support helped us get all government legal documents, housing, language courses, children's schooling, health insurance on time.

4. Recommendations

1. Develop in Orientation package with key organizations, key application forms with brief and specific support that they provide with approximate time, starting with first and last order. These package could be provided as a welcoming package for immigrants and asylum seekers.
2. Improve coordination between Job Center, Social Office, particularly at the beginning in the areas of documentation, housing and accommodations. At the start it is very hard to find a house and usually they are referred to online housing search, but for new

comes the language is the biggest obstacle. It will be wise if some consultants are being hired to contact the property owners on behalf of the immigrants.

3. When refugees are transferred to social houses, a clear guideline, direction with introduction to the residential area will be highly helpful. Usually, that doesn't happen
4. Family reunification also needs mutual understanding. Afghan families definition is different and wider and at least it includes brothers' families as well as all adults. Therefore, big houses and are at least the same city should be considered while allocating an accommodation for them. Separating adult children at the very beginning has huge psychological pressure on the family members.
5. Joint culture orientation is required. Integration into German society will be more effective if an orientation on Afghan culture is provided to at least the key primary offices and organization for immigrants. This will create a conducive environment and a culture of co-existence. Please make integration a two way process.
6. The AOK, family doctor needs further coordination, particularly finding a family doctor. It really takes time and is very crucial that the DRK, caritas and others help find the doctors for them. Particularly physiologist, psychotherapy or conduct some stress management seminars or workshops. There are various blood tests, but I think Stress test is highly recommended.
7. There is no government in Afghanistan, many Afghans at high risk do not have travel documents. These Afghans could be helped with a quick and verifiable mechanism to quickly evacuate from Afghanistan to Germany.
8. Those refugees who are well qualified, before or during the integration process could be given a chance to provide presentation on Afghanistan in universities, Schools or organizations responsible for refugees and asylum seekers.
9. Joint social gathering could be a great help between refugees and their German neighbors. This could happen once in a year and every quarter of the first year. We had a great German neighbor in Mendig, he and his wife was of great support for us as we started meeting each other. They were very supportive, friendly and social.

At the end, I would like to humbly request the German Government, people, particularly the government of Rheinland-Pfalz to quickly evacuate the remaining families and Afghans. These refugees could be an asset for Germany and as well as bridges between Germany and Afghanistan in the areas of mutual interest.

Refugees need less Termins and more smiles! 😊

Thank you very much