

Afghan voices on the situation of civil society and diaspora



Speech of Aisha Khurram

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Federal Foreign Minister Ms. Annalena Baerbock - Special Representative of the Federal Government for Afghanistan and Pakistan Dr. Jasper Wieck- ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning, thank you for having me here

I wish, today- I was standing here and sharing a story of success, a story of eventual glory and peace at the end of a dark and merciless war. Today, I wish I was talking to you as a proud peace activist from my homeland not a refugee whose life is consumed by the anxiety of living on the brink of homelessness. In fact- I can go on and on with the list of my wishes but today, it's not the time to wish or passively wait and witness the demise of a nation and its future.

Two years ago I was representing Afghan youth, their hopes and aspiration at the UNSC, This was exactly the time when the Afghan peace process has started for the first time ever since four decades of war, knowing that for decades we have remained passive receivers of agendas and fuels to the wars that had been waged by politicians who were never really going to bear the consequences of their decisions – we the younger generation decided to own our future and demand what was rightfully ours. And it wasn't just a seat at the table but the right to end a war that wasn't ours, the right to decide our future in our own terms and the right to take our fate into our own hands.

The result? Our voices were heard but not listened to-the mismanaged peace process failed- politicians decided what we feared- and at the end of the day they have left yet another disaster for my generation to deal and live with.

You might be thinking that the last two decades wasn't worth it- I admit that there have been false promises and huge mistakes that contributed to the eventual fall but they not everything was worthless- there was life, there was progress and most importantly there was hope, and today Afghanistan went from a hopeful, flourishing, developing country to a place where people only survive with humanitarian aid.

700.000 people are internally displaced, 23 million face acute food insecurity, more than a million children are at the risk of starvation each month, 24.4 million people are in need of humanitarian

assistance, and 8.4 million are in emergency level of food insecurity- the largest number in the world and the last step before famine. Drought, poverty, insecurity, oppression, human rights violations, women's full scale exclusion, and the collapse of health care, economic and educational system coupled with international sanctions are going hand in hand to drown Afghanistan in an irreversible and immeasurable catastrophe- the kind of which we might have not seen before.

These facts and numbers are huge, scary and impossible for a human's mind to process, and yet this is the daily reality for Afghan people.

But...You know I have to ask, what is it that I can say today, that has not been said before- how many Afghans have stood on international platforms for decades and have decried the broken and unfulfilled promises of the international community and their own leaders- How many of us have tried to articulate the injustice that everyone in this world knows very well and still ignores.

We are tired of reporting on the same brutality every day- of thinking of the new ways to describe the obvious. The humanitarian crisis in my home country is not hard to understand.

Injustice and starvation will not be stopped by statements of condemnation - it will not be stopped by food aid or tweets of concern- it takes more than that, it takes action, but it also takes hope and faith on the Afghan people themselves.

Lost, gone, finished and done- this is what I hear when people talk about my country nowadays, this is the mainstream perception defining a nation and its worth. When I first arrived in Germany after the collapse and slowly got engaged in activities and debates that were closely related to the unfortunate setbacks in Afghanistan, I realized that in this part of the world, there is an overwhelming appetite for closing the chapter and moving on to the next mission, I realized that there is a widespread sense of mourning as if Afghanistan is a lost cause.

But I am here to tell you that it's not over- I am here to tell you that there exist a young generation that is anything but failed and done.

Let me tell you why, Zahra Sidiqui, a recent graduate of journalism from Balkh University, opened her underground to educate female students of her district who like thousands of female students around the country are banned to attend secondary school today. Zahra is just one example of the thousands of young people who have kept the shimmer of hope alight, even under the darkest of circumstances. And these young people do not need cooking oil and flour to survive, they need hope, they need future.

And this is the time when the Afghan youth and the civil society cannot and should not be left to fend for itself, it must be made clear to the Taliban by now that, unlike 20 years ago, today's Afghan civil society has substantial influence and capacity for action. The Afghan population is not a bargaining chip to be used according to political whim, but rather has its own voice which now needs to be amplified.

I know that the international community is waiting for the findings of the assessments and consultations to decide whether it should act or not, however we are running out of time, as Afghanistan descends into one of the largest and most devastating humanitarian crises in the world.

Of course there is a need to massively step up the humanitarian assistance already announced, but today, it is essential to adopt a financially resolute approach to cooperation that is clearly shaped by civil society and extends beyond humanitarian assistance. If there's an answer to heal the wounds and

rebuild the ruins it lies within Afghanistan and Afghan people themselves because the project of building a state in accordance with external requirements and prescriptions has quite evidently failed.

I currently work with KinderBerg International, a German organization that has been working in Afghanistan since past 20 years. In the aftermath of collapse, they have decided to stay and deliver while other organizations packed and left.

They have managed to maintain their founding values and goals-which is delivery of health care services through women for women, every day on the ground- it is in fact a daily fight but they've proved that it's possible

Over the past few months, we have seen firsthand hundreds of children dying in front of us who wouldn't have died last year this time for reasons that were easily avoidable. These children are the victims of the new so called peace which the new regime brought into our country, but who is the enemy? ... Well you just have to look what causes their death:today, they are not dying of bullets but rather of hunger and poverty.

However, Since August last year- men, women and even children of Stuttgart helped us provide health care services and humanitarian assistance for women and Children of Badakhshan through their private money and donations. Your people indeed raised our hope, and revived our faith in humanity.

When I arrived in Germany, I had the chance to learn and explore a bit of German history, one day stumbled upon the story of Sophie Scholl, she was a 22 years old student, who resisted the Nazi regime, she kept a diary and was writing to her brother who was fighting in the frontlines," later on she was killed for her dream of free and prosperous Germany. Her story inspired me-and made me wonder, would I have faced her fate exactly at her age if I have not fled the country- she wrote and I quote: "you need to have a tough mind and soft heart" I had a tough mind in Afghanistan, but I have a tougher mind now that I'm in Germany because I am all by myself starting my life from the scratch as a refugee- but my heart is not soft- it is bleeding, I am everyday witness to the suffering of my people, But I am grateful to be here, still alive and still Capable of dreaming and working for a free Afghanistan- and I am grateful to Germany for giving me that chance and I wonder what would have happened to Sophie Scholl if she had the chance to flee, what extraordinary things she would have achieved with her free thoughts only if she could survive in a free thinking country, like today's Germany, and her story is probably the story of millions of young, ambitious free thinking women in Afghanistan who deserve justice and liberation within their life time.

Sophie Scholl also mentioned once that "finally someone has to make a start"

And now we have to make that start

As we are speaking of the way forward for Afghanistan today, I want you to think of the already existing potential lying in that country, German organizations that are providing alternative response to the essential needs of people should be supported by the German government to provide a substantial and consistent solution to the crisis beyond the emergency phase. Investing in consistent development projects and services through German organizations will also increase the chances of female professionals to be employed and supported on the ground.

The recently arrived Afghan refugees who will be now counted as part of the Afghan diaspora in Germany, are mostly consisted of young people, who have been raised and educated in Afghanistan and are desperately looking for ways to give back to their country. The Federal government can provide

incentive for German organizations working on Afghanistan to employ Afghan refugees in projects that are designed specifically to help Afghan people on the ground.

Today Afghanistan might be the portrait of everything gone wrong with our international community, but there is a rare chance for us, and for the world to absolve itself of the great liability of the history.

I get questioned a lot of what kind of resistance can we expect in Afghanistan and I always reply with only one word: the youth- if there is any force that can revive and sustain the cause of justice and democracy it is an educated transformed generation that can break the chains of oppression- if they are invested in instead of pitied or abandoned.

And I am sure that the free thinking people Germany will help to ensure that the young people of Afghanistan are not forgotten, learn their names, their stories, read about them, follow their work, and rest assured what they have achieved over decades may be suppressed today but can never be erased.

Because: "They can cut all the flowers but they can never stop spring from coming".