



European Campaign for Human Rights in Afghanistan

بهارات اروپایی برای حقوق بشرد افغانستان

A Brief Report:

International Conference in Hamburg 1st November 2012



Dr. Nooralhaq Nasimi addressing his speech at the third ECHRA conference



Members of the European Campaign for Human Rights in Hamburg, Germany

The European Campaign for Human Rights in Afghanistan held their 3rd conference on 1st November 2012 in Hamburg, Germany, on the issue of working towards the empowerment of children and young people in Afghanistan and also integration in the diaspora. This was a follow-up to the launch of our first and second conferences held in July 2011 and April 2012.

During this conference, we were able to provide a forum for debate on the pressing matter of children's empowerment and human rights in Afghanistan and the diaspora with the presence of guest speakers from Germany, Netherlands and Norwegian NGO's working with Afghan children in the EU.

Dr. Nooralhaq Nasimi – Director ECHRA, welcomed everyone to the third conference of the ECHRA (this one being the first international conference held) and gave an introduction to the aims of the ECHRA campaign.

Attendees and newly registered members were able to get an insight as to what the ECHRA had achieved since its inception in 2011 having been recently established as a non-governmental organisation with the aim of supporting positive social and political change for the people of Afghanistan in the diaspora and in Afghanistan itself.

Dr. Nasimi added that ECHRA is now actively strengthening its Campaign for human rights for Afghans in the UK, Europe and Afghanistan. Networking for Afghan migrants and community groups across Europe has now commenced with a focus on working together on issues affecting Afghan refugees and migrants.

In the UK our policies now include:

- Integration, detention, returns (particularly of children to Afghanistan) and working to influence the United Kingdom's policy on aid to Afghanistan and support post 2014.
- Working more closely with Afghan organisations in other European countries, and encouraging their participation in the Campaign (we already work with organisations in the Netherlands, Norway and Germany).
- Addressing issues of concern that Afghan refugees face in the many different national environments, particularly the situation in Greece where racism is high with many refugees having no access to asylum procedures and also that their detention conditions have been equated to torture by the European Court on Human Rights.

- Dublin returns.
- Meeting in Greece on Afghan refugees in Europe. Conference in the UK on Afghanistan post 2014.

The Chair, Claire Rimmer, from the European Council on Refugees and Exiles, provided everyone with an informative review on the situation of Afghan refugees in the EU, in particular in Greece and the opportunities available in the EU for human rights networks.

The next speaker, Mr. Said Assadullah Hussaini Noktadan - Director of the Tawheed Foundation in Hamburg addressed the conference on the status of disabled children in Afghanistan. He highlighted the fact that whilst hundreds of thousands of Afghans were made disabled by landmines laid during the soviet occupation, many more have acquired impairments from birth with inadequate healthcare, congenital disabilities, accidents or malnutrition and other preventable diseases. He stressed that disability is currently among the most pressing priorities in Afghanistan and should be given attention by the Government of Afghanistan as a crucial issue.

The following speaker was Mr Said Ikramudin Tahiri - Chair of the Nasr Organisation in Holland who discussed poverty and unemployment among youth and the fact that the Afghan governments paid no attention to this field. He placed an emphasis that lack of jobs or development within a country may lead to the disillusionment of the youth and could possibly result in societal unrest. Only 49% of Afghans (15-24 years old) are literate as reports by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) show. Female rates for the same age bracket are even lower at, 18% for 15-24 year olds. Serious policy gaps within the Afghan government have been partially responsible for the current state of youth unemployment.

The health service facilities in the country were addressed by Ms. Mahsa Taei – Writer and Poet, who stated that Afghanistan's health system is among the poorest in the world and that obtaining the most basic necessities – food, shelter and clothing – is a constant struggle. Such exposure intensifies an already poor health situation, with acute respiratory illnesses, diarrhoeal diseases, and malnutrition killing and weakening the children of Afghanistan.

The conference brought together NGO's from different European nations, including the Director of the Saraj Social and Cultural Organisation from Norway, Mr Mohammadullah Naqid, who addressed the root causes of violence with Afghan families.

Mr Tayeb Sharifi - Human Rights activist in Germany, provided a thorough account of children's lack of access to educational services in Afghanistan.

We were especially honoured to have a guest speaker from the Afghan Parliament present at the event, Mr Mohammad Zakaria Sawda – MP. Mr Sawda took note of the recommendations of the conference to the Afghan government and promised to include them in discussions in parliament.

The main aim of the conference was also addressed by Mr Khesrawi - Writer and Human Rights activist in Germany who spoke briefly about the lives of children in Afghanistan and the poor education system. He also gave special thanks to the UK based campaign for organising such an insightful conference.

We were able to have a representative from the German NGO 'Kinder Brauchen' present at the conference, Mr Markus Dewender.

Ms. Fanny Dethloff - Commissioner for Human Rights and Refugees, provided us with information on their work and what they are doing for unaccompanied Afghan minors.

We had two very touching presentations by Miss. Sheekeba Nasimi and Mr. Darius Nasimi who provided the conference with incites on children's lives in Afghanistan compared to a child's life in Europe.

This particular conference and other previous conferences have sought to identify and address the many issues that suppress children's rights as well as develop and formulate solutions. We gathered different initiatives for projects and ideas that were put forward for the campaign to consider focusing on reducing violence against children, sexual exploitation and forced labor, how to create training and jobs for teens, how to create health programs for children, to set up self-help groups for people in Europe and Afghanistan and to discuss campaign goals as a joint European Campaign.

Finally the ECHRA were able to propose the following:

- ECHRA wants at least 10% of the current budget of 10 billion dollars per annum allocated (1 billion dollars) to the least developed children in Afghanistan and should this happen their existing level of poverty would be improved significantly.

- The Afghanistan government should work towards the benefit of the population and the relationship between the government and its people must be improved.
- Our campaign would suggest the formation of a government that is composed of people who represent the true voice of the people so that future government's policies will truly reflect the needs of the people.
- The Afghanistan government have the support of the international community and therefore they must improve the social services. The aid distribution should reach the children and the people of Afghanistan. They have the right to be treated appropriately by the Afghan government.
- The campaign suggests that there should be an independent commission that includes the Diaspora which consists of human rights activists and civil society organisations to monitor the transparency of the Afghan government's actions. The mistakes that have been committed in the past 11 years should not continue. The international community has put in a lot of effort to create better government institutions and improvement of rule of law, and this is our obligation on how we can promote justice and democracy in our country.
- The ECHRA would be very happy to offer its assistance to the international community and work together to make sure Afghanistan and its future generations have a better future and prosperity with access to education, employment, housing and social services.

We also went briefly into the situation of Afghans living in Europe. Unfortunately many Afghan young people are forced to travel to Europe alone, and are at risk of danger along the way. We know that there is a difficult economic situation in many European countries and that the situation in Greece is particularly bad, both for the Greek people themselves, but also for the Afghan refugees who are trapped there.

Even though we have mentioned all the difficulties that exist for young people in Afghanistan, there are some European Governments who believe it is okay to send young people back to Afghanistan, without giving them any form of international protection. The European Return Platform for Unaccompanied Minors project focuses on returns of unaccompanied children to Afghanistan. The UK, Denmark, Norway, Sweden and the Netherlands participate in this

platform. Belgium has recently shown interest in joining. The Danish government was recently considering the return of 24 children to Kabul. The Danish government have stated that returns of minors to Afghanistan will be carried out upon receiving safety guarantees from the Afghanistan government and only if the returns are in compliance with international law.

Firstly, the value of safety guarantees from a government that does not control its own territory is questionable to say the least. Secondly, regarding the legality of such returns, a number of experts have found that returns of children would violate the principle of best interest of the child.

ECHRA believes unaccompanied children should not be sent back to Afghanistan if they are afraid to return. It is unacceptable for European governments to send young people back to Afghanistan until there are conditions in place for them to have shelter, food, basic security and some kind of education or employment. Instead they should be granted a legal status to enable them to stay in their country of residence.



Mr. Abdul Salam Ahmadi, European Campaign for Human Rights in Afghanistan representative in the Netherlands.



Mr. Hamid Ayooobi, European Campaign for Human Rights in Afghanistan representative in Germany.