

FARHAMAND'S STORY

Between hope and fear

*"I am only sixteen.
It shouldn't be
necessary for me
to write this letter.
There shouldn't be
a need to plead for
safety, for
humanity."*

Don Bosco International and VIA Don Bosco Salesians for fair youth participation

The Salesians of Don Bosco have been dedicated to the youth worldwide for over 150 years. Originating in the outskirts of Turin, thanks to the efforts of Saint John Bosco, the Salesians are present today in 135 countries, including 19 EU member states.

"We are committed to giving a voice to voiceless youth."

Don Bosco International and VIA Don Bosco are two organizations within the Salesian family working to empower the voiceless and promote inclusive child participation. We focus particularly on children and young people from vulnerable backgrounds, at risk of poverty and social marginalization, who lack opportunities to express themselves in public forums.

As an organization inspired by the values of Saint John Bosco, we believe that every child has the right to fulfill their potential in line with their experiences and talents.

We believe in inclusive and fair youth participation, empowering young people to speak up for the voiceless.

This is the story of Farhamand, 16 years old, a refugee from Afghanistan and now a part of the Belgian community.

This letter is the only true representation of Farhamand's story. To ensure authenticity, no words have been altered.

www.donboscointernational.eu
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Dear Madam, dear Sir,

My name is Farhamand, and I am 16 years old. I am writing you this letter because I need your help.

I need your help to spread my appeal— together with me. I want to raise my voice, along with all the people in Afghanistan who cannot speak. If they open their mouths, they will die - and the perpetrator is the Taliban.

"I want to raise my voice for all the people from Afghanistan who cannot speak."

"I am not only asking for your help for myself but also for many others in my country and around the world. The things I am requesting and writing about are experiences I went through myself, and they are experiences shared by many others.

I am writing this letter to draw attention and call for action for my country, Afghanistan. I fled my hometown, Kabul, on August 15, 2021, and arrived in Belgium on December 28, 2021.

I left my country after the Taliban seized power without elections, without any legal justification. My life was in danger at that time."

I am Hazara, and during the previous Taliban regime, it was already a dangerous time for my people. Now, I was forced to flee with my family. I left my home, my community, my country. We became refugees. There was no time to say goodbye. Danger approached quickly and very close. We had to leave immediately.

Today, after a long journey, I live in a refugee shelter, along with fifty other young people. We all share a similar story. And there are many more young people like us worldwide.

When we reached the border with Iran, with despair and hope in our hearts and minds, the border police and a group of soldiers started shooting at us. Panic ensued. A small group of people, including myself, managed to cross the border. Many did not make it. At that place, at that moment, I lost my parents and brothers.

I ask you for action so that people seeking safety are no longer attacked. I ask for action for people like me who lost their families: support in the search for them.

I arrived at the Turkish border. There was police there too. They beat me and the other people trying to cross the border. They took away our shoes and sent us back.

Even worse things happen to other people: they are tortured, their clothes are taken off, cigarettes are pressed onto their skin, they are inflicted with burns, and they are beaten.

I ask you to take action so that people are treated as humans, with respect and without violence. Appeal to all countries to protect refugees.

I crossed the sea on a small boat, overcrowded with people. It took four days and four nights, without food and in a very dangerous situation. But I would rather die by nature's hand than die multiple times through torture.

"I crossed the sea in a small boat, overcrowded with people."

I traveled on foot through different countries and survived for four months with only 120 euros, relying solely on water and bread. For three months, I couldn't wash and slept on the streets, in the rain and cold.

I wanted to reach a country where I would be safe and could build a future.

In the countries I passed through, there is often no decent shelter for refugees: they place people in tent camps, often in harsh weather conditions. There is no safety, the living conditions are very poor, and many children and young people have no opportunities to go to school.

"I ask for your commitment to safety and opportunities for people on the run, so they don't have to risk their lives. I call for action so that people in need have shelter, food, and drink, as well as a safe place and the opportunity to build their future. This action should take place in every country.

In the end, I arrived in Belgium and was fortunate that the police treated me relatively well. They directed me to registration points and places where I could find shelter. In a reception center, I could sleep, eat, and shower for two days and nights, allowing me to start a new life.

Unfortunately, many people do not have the same luck as I did. Refugees are not always treated equally. Some are forced to sleep outside, somewhere in Brussels, on the streets, or in abandoned, dilapidated buildings. While some, like me, have to make the journey on foot, others (such as refugees from Ukraine) receive a free train ticket to safely come to Belgium.

I ask for your commitment so that every refugee has equal rights and opportunities for safety. I ask for action so that no refugee is in danger and exposed to significant health risks.

On April 12, 2023, I unexpectedly received news from my family; my parents and brothers are still alive and are in Pakistan."

After almost a year and a half, there was finally good news, the news I had been hoping for so long! We had a lot to talk about, much to share with each other. After a few days, we began to hope and dream of seeing each other, meeting, embracing – finally being together again.

My parents and I sought information about what we could do. After the joy, some difficult messages arrived. It may indeed take another year before my family can come to Belgium. Because my asylum application has been approved, my family is allowed to come – but it will still take a very long time.

Currently, my family has no access to human rights in Pakistan, such as work, education, freedom, and healthcare (my mother has medical problems). They have to stay indoors all day: if there is a police check on the street, they will be deported to Afghanistan, which is very dangerous for them. If my family is deported to Afghanistan, the Taliban terrorists will kill them.

For me, it would be a great relief if my parents and brothers were here; this would give me more energy for my studies. Now I constantly think about them and worry a lot. The sooner they are here, the sooner we are together again, the better – that truly lives in my heart.

It will cost my family a lot of money to come to Belgium, and I have to work to financially assist them. Unfortunately, this means I have less time to study.

I hope the procedure will be completed quickly, and that we will have a dignified and safe life together here. It is a human right for a child to live together with their family. I miss them every day.

"It is a human right for a child to live together with their family. I miss them every day."

I advocate for every refugee family to have the opportunity to live together in a safe environment, in a country that respects their human rights. Growing up together and being a family are crucial for well-being, happiness, and experiencing care and love.

My story began at the moment when I had to leave everything and everyone behind, seeking safety, respect, shelter, and protection after everything I had been through.

But in essence, I am asking just one question:

I call for your action, so that no individual has to leave their country because their life is in danger. I ask for your action, so that no child, no young person has to go through what I and others are experiencing.

In my home country, half of the population - the girls - do not have the right to attend high school or university. If they are lucky, they can receive education until the age of eleven. After that, it stops.

Education is not the only human right they miss. Girls and women are not allowed to leave their homes. They cannot go to the park, meet people outside their household. Women live in complete isolation. Moreover, there is widespread poverty in Afghanistan. People suffer severe hunger - and out of sheer desperation, they even sell their children to afford food.

I call for action to bring attention to the human rights and education situation in my country to the world, the European Union, global political leaders, and international organizations. To take action against inhumanity and injustice.

Additionally, I urgently request the opportunity for girls to come to Europe, study here, and receive a scholarship.

Why am I asking you this?

Not because it's your job.

But because it's your duty as a human being, as a politician tasked with making this world a better place.

To take action in the name of humanity.

And yes, you find yourself in a good position to do so.

Yes, you have the means.

Yes, you have the network.

Yes, you can make time for it.

I am a sixteen-year-old boy. I shouldn't have to write this letter. I shouldn't have to ask for safety, for humanity.

I shouldn't be in Belgium, and I shouldn't be a refugee.

No one should be a refugee. No one should be forced to leave their country, to seek freedom and safety in an unfamiliar place.

'I live in the dark. It is night for me.'

I am too young to bear the pain and sorrow that I feel in my heart and mind. I should just go to school, spend time with my friends. Study, laugh, enjoy life. I should be able to complain about everyday, small problems. Not the dark dilemmas that I have experienced and still experience. I live in the dark. It is night for me.

I hope that one day the sun will rise. That it will shine its light again. In my heart, in my mind. In my life.

I feel that there is a strength within myself; I feel that I must raise my voice, take action, and ask the world for attention, care, and humanity.

I look forward to meeting you. I am eager to connect with someone who shares my dreams and wants to foster humanity in our world.

Do you want to join me on this journey? Can we do this together? I'm asking you, from my heart. Will you be the first to raise your voice - together with me, so that others can and will follow?

*"Give me a sign.
Raise your voice."*

Give me a sign, raise your voice, stand behind me and my people. Please. I sincerely thank you for reading this letter. For your time and engagement.

Kind regards,

Farhamand,

Brussels, 15 February, 2024



FARHAMAND'S DREAMS

The reason I want to share this with the EU is that they need to be aware of this situation. I fled Afghanistan to make it a better country, not to be in a comfortable situation. When people read this, they will understand what I want, what my dreams are, and why I wrote this.

First, I will address the challenges I faced in realizing my dreams.

I have been through so much, and now I am in Belgium. It was so dangerous. I did not know that behind all those walls and sleeping in mountains, and suffering from hunger, I was destined to receive a lot of support from the government of Belgium and the Belgian people.

And I see more safety and more rights here. In Belgium, there is a better education system that supports me to achieve even bigger dreams.

When I was in Afghanistan and resisted the genocide against the Hazaras, fought for the freedom of Afghan women, and tried to bring peace to my country, those were my dreams. I wished that children would have a safe childhood in their families, free from worries, war, and abuse.

But now I have bigger dreams because when I came to Belgium, I learned that there are so many people in need.

Now, these are my **dreams**:

- Helping all refugees to experience peace and comfort.
- Ending global wars.
- Standing up against the genocide of the Hazaras.
- Removing Taliban terrorists from Afghanistan.
- Building schools and achieving freedom for the Afghan people.
- Making the world a home where everyone can live.
- Becoming a politician to help those who are poor and homeless.

Farhamand,
2024.



ABOUT THE HAZARA

And meanwhile, people like me and many others are on the run, seeking a dignified existence – do not forget me, do not forget us.

I am a Hazara. And if you are Hazara, it stands out immediately: you can see it in our faces, in our eyes. We are an ethnic group in Afghanistan, and most of us are Shia Muslims. For this reason, we are not accepted, we are threatened, and we are killed. Also, for our worldview and society's vision: we believe that all people are equal, we have a lot of respect for other nationalities and religions; just think of the statues of Buddha in Bamyan. We believe in equal rights for men and women, for boys and girls.

In my country, with many beautiful people and beautiful nature, life should be good.

But now, because of our government, people suffer. People are tortured, killed, for no reason.

There is a genocide against the Hazara. That genocide began in the 19th century and has been going on for over 100 years. There is ample evidence of this.

Between 1890 and 1900, there was a mass murder of Hazara families in Hazaraja.

Under the regime of Abdur Rahman Khan (the leader of Afghanistan between 1880 and 1901) and after a fatwa under Deobandi Maulvis, between 400,000 and 500,000 Hazaras were killed, almost 60% of the total population.

In 1979, there was an uprising in the Chandawal district of Kabul, mainly led by the Hazara, against the regime of Nur Muhammad Taraki, who was the president at that time. The Hazara took to the streets because a group of students had been arrested after a demonstration. In response, the police and the military attacked the protesters. On one day, 2,000 people, mostly Hazara, were arrested and killed.

In the following days, between June 23 and July 2, another 3,000 to 10,000 Hazara people died. There is a lot of information available online, such as on the English Wikipedia under the search term 'list of massacres against Hazara people.' On the Huma Media YouTube channel, there is a video titled 'Hazara genocide explained,' along with many other videos providing information.

Throughout the 20th century, the Hazara were treated as second-class citizens by the government, receiving fewer opportunities.

During the first Taliban regime (1996-2001), many Hazara people were killed by the Taliban regime, reigniting the genocide.

After 2001, the Hazara gained some additional rights but continued to be victims of violence from the Taliban and other extremist groups.

And now, since the Taliban took power in Afghanistan (August 2021), the situation of the Hazara has worsened. People are arrested, tortured, murdered. Simply because they are Hazara. Simply because they seek equal rights. Simply because... why?

But the Hazara people are vital, resilient, and strong – we have the power of humanity in our hearts and minds. We are proud and self-aware with open minds. We rose again, and we will rise again to raise our voice for humanity. And for the equality of all ethnic groups in Afghanistan and the world. For gender equality.

'Mazari encouraged us to use our talents and develop our skills'

A good example (also for me personally) of this spirit is Abdul Ali Mazari, also known as Baba (dad, father) Mazari. He was born in 1946 and died in 1995. He died after being invited by the Taliban for peace talks. He was arrested, tortured, and murdered.

It is because of him that the Hazara people today have self-confidence; he encouraged us to send our children, boys and girls, to school. He encouraged us to use our talents and develop our skills.

If the Hazara have the energy to rise, the strength to dream, and to work towards a humane society, it is because of him. He made the Hazara intelligent and strong. If the Hazara have dreams today that keep them alive, it is because of him. If the ATVI (Afghan Technical and Vocational Institute) could develop the Mada 9, a 'supercar,' it is because of his spirit. Politically, he wanted a federal system so that different ethnic groups would have the same rights and duties.

More and more people and organizations are taking action, raising their voices. There is a lot of information available with the hashtag #StopHazaraGenocide. There are people like Zarifa Ghafari, one of the first female mayors in Afghanistan. There are people like Paul Bristow, a British Member of Parliament, and Ustad Mashal, a university professor.

