

Brishkay Ahmed:

I see myself in many ways, like as the type of filmmaker who's still trying to understand herself and trying to understand her country. So that's why I keep going back, because every time I go back, I'm learning something else. In many ways, it's like I'm looking in the mirror, but then I'm finding so many versions of me. There's so many identities.

Gilad Cohen:

You are listening to The Hum.

Taylah Harris-Mungo:

Thank you for joining us today on The Hum. We're joined here by Brishkay Ahmed, an Afghan-Canadian documentary filmmaker, who focuses her art on sharing stories of women's rights. She joins us today to talk about her life growing up in Afghanistan, the current conflicts and what Canadians can do to help. Brishkay, how are you today?

Brishkay Ahmed:

Well, thank you for having me on The Hum.

Brishkay Ahmed:

I don't know, I'm in between rage and sadness, back and forth. I can't exactly figure out in between those, but I kind of go in between those just...

Brishkay Ahmed:

There's a lot of messages coming from Afghanistan. There's a lot of messages coming from friends who are stranded in Kuwait, not show what flight they're getting into, or Qatar. Some are landing in France". They have a visa for 90 days, so you get happy and then you hear, oh no, it's just a visa for 90 days" or "I'm out, but now I don't know what I'm going to..." You know what I mean? There's a push and pull, and a tug of war going on inside everyone's hearts right now I think.

Gilad Cohen:

Despite that, we're really thankful that you can join us here today to chat more about what's happening in Afghanistan, and we want to get into that crisis in this show as well, but we actually want to start with you a little bit. And for our listeners who don't know, you were born in Afghanistan and you immigrated to Canada at the age of 12.

Gilad Cohen:

Can you tell us a little bit about what life was like for you growing up in Afghanistan at the time that you did grow up in Afghanistan?

Brishkay Ahmed:

It's kind of really interesting because of the privilege and power that my father and his family had in Afghanistan, and the relationships they had with the Socialist Party and with the Soviets at that time. I was kind of that Afghan girl from that group that was living where the Russians were living, in that part of town, in that part of Kabul, which was different for other, say other Afghan girls, my age.

Brishkay Ahmed:

We had access to water, food. We all gathered together in this country club kind of life, so I had a very different understanding of what Afghanistan was like for the whole nation, because I was young and I was secluded and isolated within the compounds of this place.

Brishkay Ahmed:

So my childhood version of Afghanistan is very different from say, other friends of mine who lived in other parts of Kabul and other neighborhoods.

Brishkay Ahmed:

My childhood was very happy, privileged. There was tensions. There were days and things where there were sirens and if you'd go to the market, there were curfews as we were getting to the end of it when the Soviet occupation and there was the war coming on. So I would hear sirens and we knew we had to get inside, and there was certain parts of town that my mum would have to go into, and she would change the way she dressed and I wondered why that was happening. Why is mum in a skirt with boots without a scarf in this neighborhood, and then when we're driving onto another neighborhood, she would suddenly put a headscarf on and fix herself and tie a wrap around herself?

Brishkay Ahmed:

So I didn't understand it. Now I understand what that meant. It meant that inside Afghanistan there's a lot of different Afghans who've built relationships with different governments and different organizations, and so we're all kind of fractured, at a loss at times, even trying to figure out each other's identity. Where do you stand? So I'm that girl.

Brishkay Ahmed:

In the past 10 years because of my work, I've actually returned to Afghanistan. I've actually gotten to know Afghanistan in all honesty, in the past decade, but till then it was a very isolated compound of Afghanistan that I had in my memory.

Gilad Cohen:

That's really fascinating. Taylah and I were spending quite a bit of time just trying to read the history of Afghanistan, and it's a really convoluted. It's got a deep history of being conquered and invaded by different groups at different points, and most recently, the Soviet and the American influence. And of course the Taliban, which ruled over much of Afghanistan from '96 to 2001, we know that when the Taliban were in power women's rights were not a priority. In fact, women lived a very different sort of life compared to men from what we understand. But you grew up there prior to that.

Gilad Cohen:

Could you tell us a little bit more about what life was like, generally, for women and girls when you were there prior to the Taliban being in power?

Brishkay Ahmed:

Prior to the Taliban, just before they arrived, there was a civil war. So there was a lot of Mujahideen and the Taliban were having this civil war. So it was a war plus two factions, two groups, the Mujahideen and the Taliban, who both had fundamentalist ideas of what women should and should not do.

Brishkay Ahmed:

They were not that different in their ideas in that sense. But prior to that, just before the nineties, again, I can only speak for Kabul because I was that kid that never exited out of Kabul, but inside Kabul, for instance, it was like any other place in the world. My mum looked like me, she didn't wear, she didn't have to abide by certain dress codes necessarily, modesty by modesty means not a tank top, like a short sleeve shirt, skirt below the knees, that kind of attire.

Brishkay Ahmed:

She was working as a teacher. She was working at an all boys school, so I remember that. Men and women met and they worked together in offices in different positions. It was still a very patriarchal society, even with the more liberal people in office in that sense, but people could live and work with men and women together and you had music was a big part of our life. We could watch Bollywood movies on TV, for instance, I do remember that, gathering and watching Bollywood movies. I remember at the barbershop, they would always have Western, old Western, movies, and that was completely fine. So you'd have Indian films being shown in the cinema and cowboy westerns being shown somewhere else. In that sense, there was, on TV, there was performers singing regularly, women in beautiful gowns and not necessarily abiding by what is considered hijab today, internationally.

Brishkay Ahmed:

Yeah. And then it changed very, very quickly, but not at the speed that things happen this time around, within a year, a year and a half. Yeah. Things have always changed really rapidly. And because I left in that rapidness and I was young, so in many ways, for me, seemed kind of exciting, because you're a child, it's all very exciting, this drama of things.

Brishkay Ahmed:

But I know that my aunts on my mom's side stayed in Afghanistan during the Taliban time. And I do remember my mum speaking to her sisters who had daughters and nieces and stuff back home, and I know that one of my cousins who I think when she was 16, when the Taliban arrived, within one year, her hair went all gray. That was very difficult for my mum because she understood what that meant if you're living like that.

Brishkay Ahmed:

It's those kinds of stories that maybe that generation like my mom's sister's generation, those nieces, those are the stories that they've shared. But the younger generations, when we don't believe the Taliban, or when the girls are really, really scared, it's because we've heard those things. We've heard of 16 year old girls whose hair was gone white in a day. Those kinds of things, they send a shiver up your spine.

Taylah Harris-Mungo:

You mentioned you left during that rapid time of change. What led your family to immigrate to Canada?

Brishkay Ahmed:

Because my father and his brothers were all working for the government in Afghanistan for Najibullah, but in that government at that time, the Mujahideen were very anti Socialist Party, very much so, and the Taliban as well. So we had to leave. There was no choice, again, similar to what's happening today. So, we couldn't have stayed because anybody who worked for, was part of the Socialist Party was associated as being communists, therefore atheists, and therefore they had to be hunted down. And my father has never returned. Yeah. He has never returned, because he's still doesn't trust. But my mother returned before she passed away. Yeah, two times, but not my father.

Taylah Harris-Mungo:

For folks who may not be familiar with your work, with you as a documentary filmmaker, how would you describe yourself as an artist in your professional life and how would you describe your work?

Brishkay Ahmed:

When we started talking, I mentioned that I've gotten to know Afghanistan in the past 10 years, and that's when I've started working as a documentary filmmaker and I started with Afghanistan the first film I wanted to make, and I've continued making films about Afghanistan and women in Afghanistan and also in Pakistan.

Brishkay Ahmed:

But I see myself in many ways, as the type of filmmaker who is still trying to understand herself and trying to understand her country. So that's why I keep going back, because every time I go back, I'm learning something else in many ways, it's like I'm looking in the mirror, but then I'm finding so many versions of me. There's so many identities that we Afghans have. There's mistrust between us too. The first time when I went to film in Afghanistan and people always ask, when did you leave? Like how we started this conversation, when did you leave?

Brishkay Ahmed:

Because, when you left tells your story to Afghans. Did you leave under the Taliban? Did you leave when the Soviets were there? Did you leave when the Mujahideens? Are you leaving now with Ghani as the president?

Brishkay Ahmed:

So people gauge you, they read you like that. And I became very uncomfortable with that and I struggled with it because there are a lot of people who supported the Mujahideen, who also left Afghanistan and I don't see them as enemies, and they don't necessarily see me in enemies, but we misunderstand each other, or we have in the past.

Brishkay Ahmed:

When I first went to Afghanistan, I was just like, "I'm an Afghan". And they're like, "yeah, but when did you leave?" And then when I explained that, I would get looks like, "oh, so you're a traitor's daughter or deal with the Soviets".

Brishkay Ahmed:

And I was like, "well, I don't think so. I don't think my father was okay with the Soviet occupation. He's written a lot about it. He's just a socialist. He just believed in a certain ideology of things". So I struggled with that. And then when I came back, I felt like I need to go back. I need to understand this more and more and more.

Brishkay Ahmed:

So yeah, and I don't think a lot of people are aware of how we Afghans are, how we gauge each other, how we read one another, and it's like a survival mechanism. I'm the type of filmmaker, I guess, that's still trying to figure what Afghanistan is, who I am as a woman, and who we are as a people, as a nation, I'd like to see us one day moving beyond attaching ourselves to regimes. I think that's my next goal. The next film I want to make is going to be a broad focused film on that.

Brishkay Ahmed:

Can we just see each other as Afghans, rather than an Afghan associated with a certain body of power and politics?

Gilad Cohen:

Listening to this is really fascinating because I was born in Israel and we immigrated here to Canada when I was younger and I, myself, have issues and questions with my own identity as well, tied to where I was born. And a lot of what you're bringing up was stirring within me, especially during this recent conflict.

Gilad Cohen:

You had mentioned like misunderstandings. Over the years, there have been many who feel like they may have a good idea of what life in Afghanistan is like, especially for women. Through all of these journeys, back and forth to Afghanistan on your own truth-seeking mission that you're on as well, what, if anything, have you noticed is missing from these interpretations of how we might perceive life in Afghanistan for women?

Brishkay Ahmed:

That's something that I've thought about a lot, and I've learned myself.

Brishkay Ahmed:

When I first arrived in Afghanistan, I looked at all the heroes. That's what we've all done is we've, I would use the word commodified, Afghan women as hero or victim, and we look at them through this lens. So it's like that complexities, the nuance, the human, I feel, gets lost because we're celebrating the ones that break barriers and do amazing things, but that's not everybody. Not everybody's capable of that. It doesn't make them less human, less beautiful, less amazing, less Afghan, less worthy of praise. Or we see them as the victim, let me help you, let me take care of you.

Brishkay Ahmed:

So I feel like what's happened is that Afghan women have felt that they've either had to play the role of hero or victim to get attention, to get help. In many ways, they have lost themselves in that.

Brishkay Ahmed:

Or a lot of Afghan women have been muted or silenced and not been acknowledged. Like I said, it's taken me, and I'm an Afghan, to step away from looking at Afghan women as heroes that get my camera's attention to, "oh, the victim that needs my camera's attention", to looking and going, "wait a minute, let me just see the human, forget this need for you to perform, to be this or that, to get my camera's attention".

Brishkay Ahmed:

That's what I would like. Even right now, if we see it, I put out a tweet and I said, "everyone in the world is writing people's names on lists to bring over from Afghanistan. That's happening all over the world". And I just put up a list and I was like, "if we can include those women who are your maids, your chefs, your teachers, the really vulnerable, the women who are not your heroes, or they're not someone in their family hasn't necessarily died of a suicide bomb, but that population that's there in the middle who we've ignored. If we can just add one or two names on the list, it will be great".

Brishkay Ahmed:

I think the world sees Afghan women as one or the other, rather than as complex. And...

Taylah Harris-Mungo:

I won't say in the introduction, but earlier in the conversation that the conflict has happened very quickly, this time. And so from the outside looking in, I think even for folks who may not have been as aware of some of the past conflicts in Afghanistan, things have really deteriorated quite quickly.

Taylah Harris-Mungo:

But the million dollar question here is, how did we get here? Has the transition of power actually been as quick as we're being told through the media?

Brishkay Ahmed:

This has been very quick. It has been very quick.

Brishkay Ahmed:

Now, Afghan media has been talking about this horror that has arrived. Afghan women have been talking about it. Just a few years back, two years back or so, we had the Red Line Project in Afghanistan where all the Afghan women were going around saying: "My red line. This is my red line in terms of negotiate negotiating with the Taliban". Everybody knew, inside Afghanistan, lots of women spoke out. How are you making peace with the Taliban? They make war on women, peace, war, something doesn't add up. Hello? We exist. Anyone listening? Nope.

Brishkay Ahmed:

Roaming into fancy hotel rooms in Doha, Mercedes bringing people in, you're just in shock. It's so absurd. Acknowledging the absurdity of it, for some reason, I don't know why mainstream media didn't pick up on it.

Brishkay Ahmed:

I honestly don't know how big famous journalists could sit on CNN or all these reports and just talk about the peace talks like they're having tea. As if it wouldn't impact women. Not even questioning. I don't know how that works. I'm flabbergasted.

Brishkay Ahmed:

So this conversation has been going on. Absolutely. President Ghani has spoken up about it, the international community, some from NGOs and things have been seeking out about it. But then the United States had a president by the name of Donald Trump.

Gilad Cohen:

I've heard of him.

Brishkay Ahmed:

We're the lucky ones, aren't we, that we haven't met him. That's what I say. But you give such a political conundrum in the hands of this person, and he signs a deal with the Taliban

Gilad Cohen:

Brishkay, I'm curious for you, after seeing things go back to Taliban rule after 20 years of U.S.-led control after the, I imagine, trillions and trillions of dollars that went into that 20 year, or like for you personally, does it feel hopeless in a way?

Gilad Cohen:

And I'm not sure how to phrase that correctly, but so much has gone into that.

Brishkay Ahmed:

What's different and what does make you feel hopeless is the fact that the Taliban, this time, they've been paraded around the world as somewhat of a legitimate government.

Brishkay Ahmed:

They've entered fancy hotel rooms from rich fancy cars in Russia, in Doha, in Turkey. Before we kind of saw them as these crazy fundamentalists in caves, that was our imagery of them. We didn't trust them. We didn't like them. We knew that their ideas were not in line with humanitarian goals, but they've been, in the past two years, been marketed as somewhat of these...

Brishkay Ahmed:

They could be leaders, they could represent a nation. They've been kind of branded that way. So it's scary because that means that they could retain their power longer. And they might not necessarily go into immediately, like what we saw, '94, '95, where women are stoned to death in Kabul stadium or something, but it might be a very slow creeping process towards that.

Brishkay Ahmed:

So slow that maybe the world will stop paying attention. That might happen, or it just might be a never-ending crisis. Like what's happening in Syria with the humanitarian impact. It's heartbreaking.

Taylah Harris-Mungo:

In hearing you talk about the way that at some mainstream North American news outlets and celebrity journalists have been sleeping on this story that Afghan women have known for years, that Afghan people have known for years, African media has known for years. I'm wondering if you feel like, in some ways, North American media and government, in some ways, are complicit in the harms that are impacting Afghan women.

Brishkay Ahmed:

I can tell you with certainty, the United States is complicit.

Taylah Harris-Mungo:

Fair enough. Yeah.

Brishkay Ahmed:

I do. I absolutely believe that. The world saw that in their mismanagement of the wrap-up, the signing the deal, moving the date from May to August, to September, playing Russian roulette with a very dangerous group, that's called the Taliban, who doesn't believe in diplomacy.

Brishkay Ahmed:

So you know that. You've been sitting at a table with them for two years, three years, you know them better than anyone, and the fact that they are complicit because Afghan women through the entire peace deal negotiation kept on asking: "We want to be at the table. We want to be at the table". Four were allowed. Four that were allowed were selected. They weren't from any of the human rights organizations, they were all political figures. They all did their best. They're all fantastic female activists as well. I know them and I respect their work, but that doesn't speak for all the women.

Brishkay Ahmed:

We have a Hazara community that is women and men at a great risk. They should have had more representation. They should have had their voice heard. These are the people that are most likely going to be targeted, the Shias. But everybody knows that, everybody knows what the Taliban's philosophy is about Sunni, Shias, and all of these kinds of things, what they think about.

Brishkay Ahmed:

So these core elements were understood. So if the United States decided not to include the Hazara community's voice, if they decided not to include women, then they are complicit. Definitely the Trump administration, absolutely. Every single person on there. I don't know what happened with the Biden administration. I don't know if he was just given a shit of a hellhole to deal with by the former president. I don't know about that, about Washington's political games, what they do to one another, how they punish one another. I don't know, but certainly the evacuation and the handling, the origin of this matter, there's some responsibility in the hands of the United States, for sure.

Gilad Cohen:

You mentioned this evacuation and basically it's rapidly evolving, but right now we're in a situation where the Americans are out. The allied forces are all basically gone. We'll get into Canada in a little bit,



but the Canadians got out of there in a heck of a hurry. The Afghan government has collapsed and now the Taliban are ruling the streets of Kabul again. And basically overnight, we have millions of Kabul residents who have been left to navigate a really uncertain transition after 20 years of U.S.-backed rule, right?

Brishkay Ahmed:

Well, not just left, just 30 minutes ago near Kabul airport has been bombed three times, just in the last 45 minutes. And ISIS is taking responsibility for that. You're having more seeping in. More violence, more dangers seeping in the midst of it. So, that's also something that's happened in just the past hour.

Gilad Cohen:

I saw that notification pop up on my phone as we were actually just getting ready to sit down. It's like I said, it's rapidly evolving, but can you tell us a little bit more about what's actually happening on the ground right now for residents specifically in Kabul? Because there seems to also be some contradictions between outright chaos for some, and then in some places we're also reading a sense of relief for others.

Brishkay Ahmed:

And again, we come back to this understanding, which like, I'm glad you picked up on that, not many do. Afghans, there are many Afghans. There are young men in Kabul who pledge allegiance to the Taliban. They're Afghan-Talibans, there's also non Afghan-Taliban. So when you say, are there are Afghans who are like, "I'm really glad the Taliban are here. I love the Taliban". These are young men who have grown up. They don't understand that horrendous things.

Brishkay Ahmed:

They just look at as being a Taliban as being Afghan and being, fighting for Afghanistan, anti-American sentiments. You know what I mean? So that word itself is a bit misunderstood outside of Afghanistan.

Brishkay Ahmed:

Inside of Afghanistan, people have different sort of ideas about it and allegiances to it. And also the chaos around the airport situation is also where you live. Where are you coming from? So if you're from [inaudible 00:21:53] which is the Hazara community, the roads are closed. They're scared to get out because they're targeted.

Brishkay Ahmed:

Then you can come from another neighborhood, for instance, and where the foreign military has cleared the road. So those kinds of things create chaos and havoc, where you get different reports 'cause where you live, who you have connections with, all these things come into play. But beyond that aspect of getting to the airport itself, what's really chaotic and insane is...

Brishkay Ahmed:

Think about this, within 72 hours or a hundred hours, people have had to leave all their earnings behind in bank accounts. Their cars, apartments are just being abandoned 'cause, well, what? What's going... What are you going to do? People are just abandoning things, and they're abandoning things on promises. We're not sure these promises are going to be kept. So my dear friend, Fatima, who's a young Hazara girl, was lucky enough to get on a flight on France, and she messaged me. And she said that she's

in quarantine for 10 days in Paris. She has a 90 day visa. And I said, "what does that mean Fatima"? She said, "I don't know".

Brishkay Ahmed:

Another friend of mine has 180 day visa to Sweden. There are days and months visas. What's going to happen to them after? There's a confusion about where will I go after, what will happen to me? Everything I've had has just been abandoned. I think a very small percentage on the ground are able to get on those flights, having packed their life up peacefully. Do you know what I'm saying?

Brishkay Ahmed:

I would say 90% are jumping on a plane with a complete uncertain future. The moment that they're getting on the plane, they feel, the message I get is like, "yes!" And the literally upon arrival in Kuwait, or Qatar, or France, the messages change: "I don't know what's going on. I'm stuck in Qatar. They're saying that I'm supposed to arrive in Canada, but they don't know when. How long will it take, Brishkay"? I don't know. And these are people who are in detention centers for audiences who might think that these people are getting shipped, evacuated, they're being put in refugee camps, detention centers. There are women who are giving birth in the airports.

Brishkay Ahmed:

So the uncertainty is just, I don't know what'll happen. And also there's a great amount of mistrust, that's another thing in the airport itself. What's dangerous, the people are sending messages to people saying, "send all your passport info, send in your ID, you'll get on, you will get another evacuation flight". So I'm so-and-so from Denmark, I'm so-and-so, and people are handing over the identifications. Imagine what if these people, everything is done, you've just handed over every bit of information about you to God knows who and you're telling them, "I'm a journalist, I'm a female athlete. I'm a filmmaker, I'm a writer. I have a podcast". If it was difficult to find you before, it's not anymore.

Taylah Harris-Mungo:

That really underlines the level of desperation that folks who know that they're in a crisis situation are willing to give up that kind of information, and in some ways potential freedom, to just escape.

Taylah Harris-Mungo:

That's heartbreaking, truly.

Brishkay Ahmed:

These are people who wouldn't normally do that. We're talking about journalists handing over their information, doctors handing over their information.

Brishkay Ahmed:

So people shouldn't be surprised that there's a woman that's handing her baby over to an American soldier, when you are, literally, you're not sure if death's knocking on your door. Well, that's what people do.

Taylah Harris-Mungo:

You mentioned the states being complicit, which we all can agree on, in some of the atrocities that are going on in Afghanistan and have been going on in Afghanistan.

Taylah Harris-Mungo:

What role do you think Canada plays in the situation? Many folks are saying that we've been dropping the ball, especially now, getting Afghans safely out of the country. And we actually, we managed to pull a quote from an online publication called The Line and their editor, Kevin Newman, the quote here says: "Canada has been slow to react, risk averse, and selfish. We've relied on our neighbors more than each other, turned our backs on thousands who proved their loyalty to us and even blamed criminals for our inability to protect people we know are in real fear of being murdered".

Brishkay Ahmed:

On this note here, I will say that Canada was taken by surprise. And I know this on this note, I will stand up for Canada on this note, because the journalists that were from my documentary, that I filmed them, these journalists' names were given to the Canadian embassy to help get them out earlier on. And the woman that handled that literally, until seven days before, messaged me unaware that this is going to happen because we were booking my film screening at the embassy. And she was like, "okay, so which day, so tell..." She could fly to come down and meet me and we'll arrange it.

Brishkay Ahmed:

She was taken by surprise, and she's one of the top officials inside the Canadian embassy. I think that most NATO nations were hit really hard. I believe that the Canadian embassy inside Afghanistan, from my communication with them, did not expect things to turn out this way.

Brishkay Ahmed:

They were taken by surprise in my communication with them, and the women that they have been able to help, they seem to be doing as much as they can. Now keep in mind. These are also people who are working under intense situations themselves. It's not easy for Westerners who are in Afghanistan either, let's just clarify that. They also are targets for the Taliban in that.

Brishkay Ahmed:

I guess what I would say is that let's not assume the worst. Canada has been trying to do what they can. We've all seen images of what that airport looks like, and I'm not trying to say this because I want to be a Canadian prime minister, or I'm for any political parties, I'm actually anti-politics, but we have to be sensible. Look at those photos. What can you do in that kind of space and time, especially when the airport is being controlled by the United States and the United States has taken control of the airport and dictating aerospace regulations to other nations?

Brishkay Ahmed:

So what can you do? That's the first. It's not like Canada has control of the airport. They don't, the United States took control of it within, like immediately. I think they took over and they were managing the runways and things like that. But what I do know, I believe that Canada will step up. I'm hoping that Canada will take Afghan refugees, not just on temporary visas. I'm hoping that they will be able to relocate here. I'm hoping Canada will do that. There's a ton of Afghan refugees awaiting in Kuwait and Qatar and these other nations. I expect Canada to step up, because Canada's mission was a little bit

different in its intentions, the programs and things that they were involved in inside there. I don't think Canada had a representative in the Doha peace talks. I'm not sure, but I don't think they did. Like I know Germany did for instance.

Brishkay Ahmed:

And coming to that, this is on a different note, again, I'm not a political person at all. But yesterday Maryam Monsef was on Twitter and she got chewed out, chewed out for one statement she made, when she said, "my brother is a Taliban, please let people evacuate".

Brishkay Ahmed:

When I stood up and I responded in understanding her reason, it's not like I'm trying to get her reelected or anything like that, that's not my intention, but I can tell you that as a Canadian representative, she was just trying to be an Afghan woman and connect with people on the ground there who understood her language. And she knows that there's two kinds of Taliban. There's the Afghan-Taliban, and then there's the Taliban that comes from Pakistan and from outside. And she's just using the word "brother", because at those checkpoints leading onto the road, the people given those little lower level positions of checking cars and things may just be the Afghan-Taliban who might respond to the word "brother", because we do respond to one another as "brother" and "sister", we do, that's our culture.

Brishkay Ahmed:

So this tone-policing that was going on was a bit dramatic and insensitive, I thought. And I think it's easy for us to attack Canada because we're here and to just go for it, but I'm going to say that I'm going to hope that Canada will step up because I believe it can. I think it has the capability. I think inside Canada, we have amazing organizations that can support the Canadian government and help these refugees adjust to life in Canada. We certainly have the ability to do that. And so, because we do, I think they should, and they will. And everybody inside Canada, if you're part of organizations, then just step up and help them get it done.

Gilad Cohen:

When Trudeau was running for prime minister the first time, he was running at the same time that the conflict in Syria was coming to a blow and he does have a track record. The last I looked, I believe 44,000, over 44,000 Syrian refugees have settled in Canada since 2015. So, we can all be hopeful, and for any Canadians that are listening to this who want to be able to help, who want to show some support and help Afghans on the ground in Afghanistan, get out or find help. What can Canadians right now do?

Brishkay Ahmed:

There's so much information about that right now, online, it's hard to decipher what is the right approach. And there's tons of funds that opened up. What do you do with that? Who do you donate to? Which organizations?

Brishkay Ahmed:

The first thing Canadians could do is that when the Afghan refugees come and treat them with dignity and humanity and compassion. Let's just start with that. Beyond that, I think research the organizations you're supporting and the sites you're giving funding to, and just make sure that you give it to the right source.

Brishkay Ahmed:

Give Afghan women, and also Afghan men, and youth a platform because obviously the mainstream media missed the mark completely on our situation. And that's why in many ways we are where we are. I firmly believe that the media is responsible for a lot of the things that happen in this world if they're not reporting on it correctly, and they're not giving a platform to people in those nations voices.

Brishkay Ahmed:

If all you're doing is sending your Western correspondence down there, you're just going to get a filtered view of what's happening. So yeah, give platforms for Afghans. I don't want to say this organization or that, but certainly there's enough information to find out which are the most trustworthy and effective.

Gilad Cohen:

We wanted to end this here. You are an Afghan-Canadian, you are a storyteller, you focus a lot of your stories on women's rights and a lot of people right now are anticipating that the Taliban being in power will reverse progress for women in the country.

Gilad Cohen:

As an Afghan-Canadian storyteller yourself, what stories do you anticipate will need to be prioritized from Afghanistan going forward for the next little while?

Brishkay Ahmed:

Well, I'm sure that the Taliban will get a lot of coverage. Let's stop giving them too much limelight, let's just diffuse that a little bit about them.

Brishkay Ahmed:

You know what would be really important? It's that there's a generation of Afghan women whose voices are not heard, and that is the women who are 60 and above. The women that have been through this ride in Afghanistan, who've seen it through regimes. Let's give them, I'm hoping that their voices are heard, that their experiences come out. There's a lot of focus on just the youth, which is great, but also, there's others.

Brishkay Ahmed:

As rights start being pulled back, the globe and the Taliban will know the women are here because our community is essential. The religious minority, the Shia community in Afghanistan it is essential that we give them a voice. I cannot even stress that. That's a community that actually has not been given a voice, to be honest, even during the nineties, '95, '96, '97, and we didn't really hear a lot about what the atrocities that were happening against the Hazaras, but now we live in the digital age and so those stories will come out. So we need to make sure that everyone knows that they are supported. I think those are the marginalized. Those are the ones that are the most vulnerable. So in terms of... Those stories are crucial.

Gilad Cohen:

Brishkay, thank you so much for joining us here today.

Gilad Cohen:

Like we said at the beginning, we know that this is a very unpredictable and very emotional time for you.

Gilad Cohen:

We send love to you and your family and your community, especially back home in Afghanistan.

Gilad Cohen:

And again, thank you so much for coming here today and telling us a little bit more about your story.

Brishkay Ahmed:

Thank you both so much.