
Afghanistan. Suspended lives: those unable to leave

Suspended lives: those who attempted to leave Afghanistan before August 31 and did not succeed. As the situation in the country grew increasingly critical, their only hope was to leave. Now that hope is gone. They are left with fear. It's a stifled cry of pain, too dangerous to be heard. While Afghanistan is facing a severe crisis affecting all aspects of its life, the dream of returning to a normal life or managing, in one way or another, to get out of the country, is growing weaker by the day. SIR contacted a person leaving in Afghanistan for a first-hand account - although their name, their gender, and any other information that could somehow be linked to them cannot be disclosed. It was a clear request, because in Afghanistan today it's a matter of life or death. **What is the current situation in the country?**

People are afraid. They are worried about the future, and they are especially worried for their children, their daughters in particular.

Personal safety in Afghanistan is hardly possible without the police, the army and the government. Only the Taliban have weapons at the moment. Food prices are very high. An estimated 18 million people are left with no food and are bound to suffer from malnutrition. NGO aid workers are no longer carrying out their work, which our people greatly valued, and those with higher education have left our country. Universities have also been closed. All border crossings are closed and there is little chance of leaving the country. On top of that, we are afraid of attacks by Daesh. The people are hoping to return to a normal life, but it seems impossible at the moment. **Were you also planning to leave?** I repeatedly asked for help to leave with my family. At some point I was finally told I was on the list of those to be brought to Italy, I just had to wait. On August 24 I got a phone call from an Italian number telling me to go to the airport, with no document from the Embassy or the government. On August 25, at daybreak, we made our way to Abbey Gate so that we would be there as soon as possible. When we arrived there were thousands of people near the Gate, controlled by the US military. There were no Italians in sight, and a 3-metre wide channel of dirty water stood between the US soldiers and the people. The priority was to ensure the departure of US and British citizens first. *I tried to get through but nobody listened to me. The channel was hard to cross without the authorisation of the US forces.* **So what did you do?** I unsuccessfully tried to call the Italian number I had been called from, and also texted the emergency number they had provided, but never received a reply. After several hours of waiting, I returned home. I made another attempt to reach the airport on August 26th, but this time by evening. I found the same crowds, but I managed to talk to an American: I told him that I was on the list of people registered to leave for Italy, but he would not let me access the area where Italians were waiting because I did not have an email or an official letter. *I made many phone calls and sent out several messages to the numbers I had, but nobody ever replied. At 10 p.m. the US army closed the gate.* We stayed there until 5.30 a.m. of the following day and got no reply. Meanwhile, on the afternoon of the 26th, the airport was hit by bombs. God saved us from the explosion: we were still on our way and had not yet arrived there. I was later informed that I was on the list of people waiting to be called, but on 27 August evening I learned that the last flight for those returning to Italy had already departed. People were left with no information. Other countries organised buses after the airport explosion and safely picked up people who were on the list from their homes. **What now?** I have been trying to get out of Afghanistan and I am waiting for news from the Italian Government. It is their responsibility to help people who are waiting here in dramatic circumstances leave the country. The mission is not successful for all. In fact, by deciding to terminate repatriation from Kabul at an earlier date, on August 27, the Italian government abandoned all those who, like me, were on the list and are now facing a difficult situation. I personally don't know anyone else who was meant to reach Italy, although I do know people who remained in Afghanistan when they should have left for Germany, Spain, Great Britain and the United States.

Until all those whose lives are at risk remain in Afghanistan, the mission remains incomplete.

What are you most afraid of? All those with higher education, people who have been working with foreigners, people who tried to leave the country but failed, the Taliban may ask why they did it.

It's a terrifying question.

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