

The Watford Word

HOPE Worldwide Afghanistan Collection

"Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise." Luke 10:36-37

Jesus blew his hearers' minds by explaining that their neighbour is *anyone* in need. He was very clear. We cannot limit ourselves to helping those from our own culture, community or religion. We know that the people in Afghanistan are in need. Therefore, they are our neighbours, regardless of their religion or community.

HOPE has been operating in Afghanistan since 2001, before and during the war, as well as during the state of civil war that continues. Our consistent presence has helped the government trust HOPE's work. Here are a few details of what it is like to be a woman living in Afghanistan.

There is no schooling for girls after primary education. Women cannot work. There are a few exceptions, such as women working in the health sector in clinics and hospitals. Women cannot work with men. They must wear a burka and an Abhaya whenever they are outside of their home. The Burka covers from the shoulders to the sole of your shoes, and the Abhaya covers your face, leaving only a slit for the eyes.

Women are not allowed in government offices, nor in the same room with men other than family members.

As a woman, it is intimidating to fly into Afghanistan from India on my own. I am often the only woman on the flight. But God has continued to look after me and has opened doors for me.

A few months ago, I visited Afghanistan and was invited by the Ministry of Economy to a meeting. I was the first woman to enter this government office since the Taliban's August 2021 government.

I addressed an audience of all male students graduating from our training centre in the

presence of officials from the Ministry of Social Affairs. There were over 60 men in the same room and no other women. I felt that at any time I could be arrested and taken into custody. However, since then, the government has asked that our curriculum be shared with other NGOs operating nationwide. In the last 7 months, officials have made random visits 3 times to assess our students, but they now seem more interested in being trained at our centre themselves.

On August 31 and September 3rd, there were two major earthquakes measuring 6.1 and 5.8 on the Richter scale. They occurred in a very remote part of Afghanistan. On a typical day, it would take 8 hours by road to get to these areas from the nearest major town. The roads are narrow and carved into the hillside. Rescue was very difficult, as most of the time the mobile clinic's equipment and medicines had to be carried on people's backs. On top of this, Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries in the world and has very little access to help from richer countries.

The worst thing was that many women and children were under the debris, and yet religious rules prevented any man who was not a member of the woman's family from helping them out of the debris. Their religion prevented them from touching a woman who was outside their family. Many hundreds of women remained trapped under the debris from the first earthquake and had no chance of survival when the second one hit.

HOPE and other organisations have contributed to help the communities affected by the earthquake. Others have provided temporary shelters, water and kitchen utensils. HOPE will supply food and water for the survivors.

There is so much work to do. Please keep us in your prayers.

Your sister, Valli