

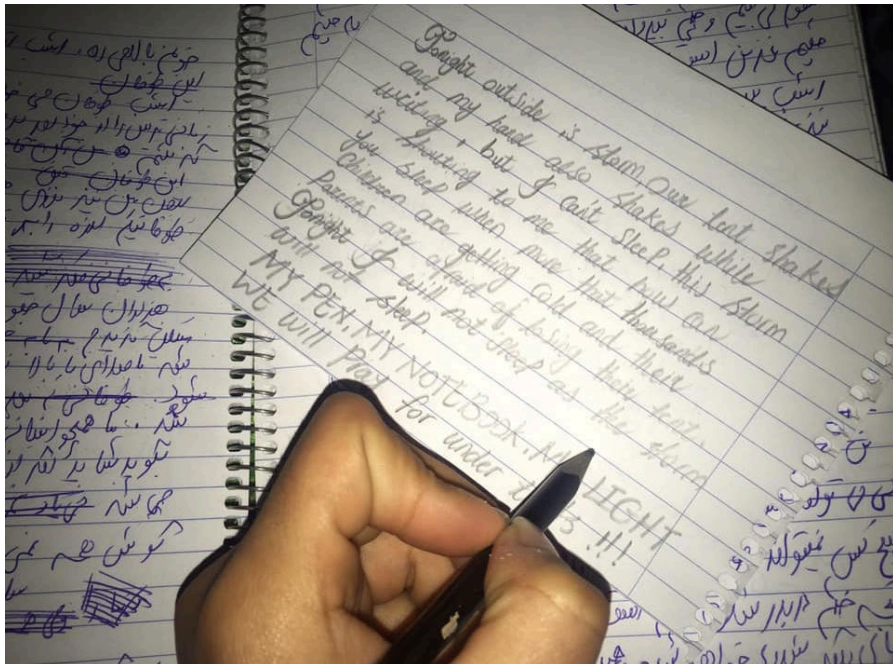


**My pen won't break,  
but borders will.**

Letters to the World from Moria

*Written by Parwana Amiri*  
2019–2020

w2eu-Alarm Phone



# My pen won't break, but borders will.

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In September 2019 the Watch The Med Alarm Phone received a GPS-location close to the northern coast of Lesbos. It was sent from a boat. We informed the Greek coastguard and the rescue teams on the shore. Some hours later we got in touch with the people again and they confirmed they were safe and had been brought to a camp.

It was only a few days later, when some of us went to Lesbos to remember and celebrate 10 years of struggles on this island with the network of Welcome to Europe, we contacted the people who had been on that boat and they agreed to meet us. They told us about the hard trip that was behind them, they told us that they had to try four times before finally reaching Greece. Twice they had been intercepted by the Turkish coastguard and another time blocked by the Greek coastguard near Alexandroupolis.

There was still a struggle ahead of them. They got stuck in the hotspot of Moria. Or better to say outside the hotspot of Moria – the camp had 12,000 people inside and an official capacity of just 3,000. It was crazily overcrowded already at that time, with small summer tents far up in the olive grove outside the camp. The numbers would rise in the next months – by the end of the year 21,000 people were stuck on Lesbos.

We finally shared time with the families who had travelled on the boat. There were several families from one neighbourhood, even three generations. We spent a touching dinner all together. We visited them a day later in their tents, with many musicians we went up to the olive grove, singing and dancing to the rhythms of freedom in all our languages.

Parwana, a teenage girl from Afghanistan, had been on that same boat. When we met, we spoke about dreams, future plans and we shared a lot of the daily problems she was facing. This story continues until today: It turned out that Parwana very much liked writing to express herself. First, she was shy to write in English, but as she is a bright woman, she overcame this fear quickly and started to document what she experienced in “Letters from Moria”.

Parwana’s “Letters from Moria” are published on Welcome to Europe’s blog <http://Infomobile.w2eu.net>. The letters talk about life in the horrible conditions of a camp made to deter people from reaching a place of safety. She changes perspectives in each of her letters. She writes from the perspective of an old woman, who bakes bread to sell in order to buy medicine for her husband, of a young boy who is afraid to lose himself, of a young woman suffering from the abuse of men all around her and she writes from the perspective of a transgender person.

These letters were written mostly at night by torchlight in the tent that Parwana shared with her eight-person family, in the olive grove. She always waited until everyone was asleep, so that she would have the peace of mind to write in the darkness with her torch. At the end of December, Parwana and her family were finally transferred to a camp on mainland Greece, where Parwana continues to document the conditions and publish her words.

This first book of hers is just the beginning. We are happy to be part of her journey

Parwana is unbelievable – full of power and energy. One of the many women and girls we met who are in the middle of this hard journey. They are searching for a place where they can freely express themselves and find access to education without fear – and where they can find a position to change this world that is so full of injustice, an injustice that each of Parwana’s letters expresses crystal clear. A new generation is on their way to join the global uprisings of women, hungry for change.

There is only one solution to end the suffering that Parwana and thousands of others are facing on the Greek islands: Freedom of Movement for all those stuck there!

We hope they can finally find a place where they can live in peace and dignity.

We will be on their side!

W2eu- Lesbos/Athens/Hanau/ Hamburg

## Letter to the world from Moria (No. 1)

October 2019

Author: A migratory girl

**“Put yourself in our shoes!** We are not safe in Moria. We didn’t escape from our homelands to stay hidden and trapped. We didn’t pass the borders and risk our lives to live in fear and danger.

**Put yourself in our shoes!** Can you live in a place, that you cannot walk alone even when you just want to go to the toilet. Can you live in a place, where there are hundreds of unaccompanied minors that no one can stop from attempting suicide. That no one can stop from drinking.

No one can go out after 9:00pm because the thieves will steal anything you have and if you don’t give them what they want, they will hurt you. We should go to the police? We went a lot and they just say that we should find the thief by ourselves. They say: ‘We cannot do anything for you.’ In a camp of 14,000 refugees you don’t see anyone to protect us anywhere, even at midnight. Two days ago there was a big fight, but no one came to help until it finished. Many tents burned. When the people went to complain, no one cared and even the police told us: ‘This is your own problem.’

In this situation the first thing that comes to my mind to tell you is, we didn’t come here to Europe for money, and we did not come to be European citizens. It was just to breathe a day in peace.

Instead, hundreds of minors here became drug addicts, **but no one cares.**

Five human beings burned, **but no one cares.**

Thousands of children don’t have their vaccinations, **but no one cares.**

I am writing to you to share and I am hoping for change...”

*Parwana*

## Letter to the World from Moria (No. 2)

October 2019

### The way from Afghanistan to Greece; stories of unsafe border crossings

The reasons people escape their home are different according to their individual stories – their families, jobs and the situation in their villages / towns of origin. But the main factor is the internal and cross-border war – not just for us Afghans but for most refugees.

When forced to leave and journeying this way, we are risking our lives in order to survive. Even after considering all dangers and the possibility of death, this is still the better choice amongst bad alternatives.

All refugees from Afghanistan have to cross several borders to arrive here. Even though we start our journeys in different circumstances, with or without Afghan passports, with or without residence permits from Iran / Paksitan (valid and invalid) we all suffer hundreds of dangers on the way. Some start their escape route in Afghanistan, others have already been living for years as refugees or people without papers in Iran and Pakistan, some were even born as refugees.

We ride on motorbikes, pick-ups, trucks with too many others driving through stony deserts. We walk many kilometers over mountains and through rivers. We cross fences and seas. We find ourselves confronted with police, soldiers, smugglers and thieves. We spend nights outside without knowing where we are, without blankets in the cold, rain or snow and without food and water. They shoot at us, we get robbed, kidnapped, threatened, raped. We see dead people along the way. Many of us are kids or minors, many escape with their families, with their grandmothers and grandfathers or sick relatives.

### Do you think, this is a simple choice to take this route to freedom?

On the way from Afghanistan to Europe, there are places controlled by thieves that even the smugglers and soldiers are afraid of. I heard a story of a family who thieves stopped and robbed all their belongings. They threatened them, that if they wouldn't give them what they wanted, they would sexually abuse their women. They survived the attack but were left with nothing but their lives and the clothes on their bodies. In another case five minors were robbed, beaten and taken hostage for two nights, they weren't given more than a small piece of dry bread a day. They felt especially horrible, as there were also two girls kept hostage who both got raped and murdered. In another case a family told me, how they crossed the desert with their four kids and two other families. There was no shade and no shelter. They were without water and their kids dehydrated. They struggled: either peace or death.

When we arrive in Iran, we face a country full of racism against Afghan refugees, who make up the majority of immigrants there. Just like our home, the country is full of racism against the atheists, ethnic or religious minorities and political opponents. It is a country where refugees cannot attend formal education or obtain Iranian nationality, even if born there. It is a country where violence against women, strangers and even their own people is often silenced and remains unpunished. A country where you cannot speak freely. A country where citizenship is sold for the price of death as a soldier in war.

After crossing the rocky mountains, we reach Turkey. A family expressed it like this: "We were stuck for two nights on a snowy mountain. When our small baby started crying the police came and arrested us. They deported us all the way back to Afghanistan. So, we again had to pass Pakistan's border and then Iran's border."

The sea between Turkey and Greece is a black water full of death and corpses. People died because the priority in Europe is to control borders and not save lives.

**Do you think these parents are ready to put their children's lives in danger?**

No one, no one, no one ... chooses this without having a bigger danger behind his/her back. In every moment, these mothers and fathers are afraid. They decide to risk death just to give their kids the hope of peace.

We refugees walk on a path of fire, from which we try to escape. When we see another way, one without fire, we will choose it without thinking for a second, without knowing if there will be other dangers. We have to choose this way, so that we won't burn. But this other way, the one without fire, is where Europe put barbed wire, where war ships stop us from reaching our destination, where our dreams for peace get lost in the sea and the "lucky" ones end up in the hell of Moria.

**Do you really think we arrived here easily?**

*Parwana*

## Letter to the World from Moria (No. 3)

*October 2019*

### I AM A MINOR WITHOUT A GUARDIAN

See what our problems are ...

**In Moria we have no place to stay.** We are without shelter among thousands of adults and strangers. We sleep on the floor, in tents and anywhere we can find until we may get a place in an overcrowded container.

**We are alone and there is no love.** I feel I am the most lonely person in the world. We have no relative, no family to be with. We have no one to talk to and to protect us or give us advice. It is the main reason why we think of suicide and why many of us end up with addictions.

**We have nothing useful to do.** Oh, I became tired of life. It is boring to just wait not knowing why. There are no activities for us. There is no variety in our days but always the same rhythm. Every day is the same in Moria. There is no difference between yesterday and today. I am a teenager full of energy. I should get rid of this energy like a snake empties its poison. I want to learn things, do things, grow.

This situation destroys me. It is changing my thoughts.

**I am thinking** to leave this camp and this island any way I can – legal or illegal. I would even climb under a truck to get on the ferry to Athens. I cannot be here anymore.

**I am thinking**, what should I do? I am desperate because I have no money. I started smoking today, maybe I will take drugs tomorrow so I do not feel hungry, so I do not feel that time has stopped, so that I can be far from this bad world.

**I am thinking**, should I wait four months for a medical age test to correct my age or should I just run?

I am feeling hurt, seeing the others who have their mothers next to them and a shoulder to cry on, someone to trust.

I have become a lost child, who doesn't know what to do or where to go. I need guidance.

**I am thinking** that every person I see in front of me is a wolf looking for a goat. I am scared.

I am thinking, why is there is no candle to light my dark path?

I am bothering girls to make them feel weak and me strong.

I have become afraid of losing everything, losing my beliefs, loosing myself, loosing my way.

**How long am I going to be here in Moria?**

**How am I going to survive this?**

**Who can I trust?**

Hundreds of us are in this situation here. We are more than 1,000 on this island, in this hell, I heard. Together we could have the power to build a city, to improve a country's economy, to change big things. Instead we don't even know how not to destroy ourselves. We just need someone to hold our hand and lead us the right way, to tell us about good and bad, right and wrong. To tell us how to use our power in a positive way, a way that will make us proud of ourselves and our families and society proud of us too, someone to remind us who we are.

*Parwana*

P.S. Special thanks to Yaser. I hope you will find your way my friend!

## Letter to the World from Moria (No. 4)

*October 2019*

### From a chat with one mother of many in Moria camp...

A baby with 3 days diarrhea and vomiting...

Only a mother can understand me. My baby got sick and she started vomiting and having diarrhea for three days. I was seeing her crying, but I could do nothing. I was seeing her vomiting, but I could do nothing.

This is the third day that I am going to the doctor waiting for four behind the door, but no one cares. In one day, I had to bring her about 14 times to the toilet and every time I had to wait 10 minutes in the queue.

After waiting four hours at the clinic, they gave me just two spoons of syrup and a tablet that didn't help. Every night I had to stay awake till morning with my daughter and again I had to go to the clinic at 05:00 am, even though the clinic opens at 08:00 am, but I had to take a number.

I want my daughters' health back. We are all mothers and we are all human. We want to see our kids smiling. We are living on one planet. While you are designing your daughters' kids room. I am trying to keep mine warm at a fire.

Finally, I had to take my girl to the hospital in town, but I didn't even have the 2€ to buy a bus ticket. I had to borrow it.

Now, god gave her health back, but still I cry because when she wants to eat a banana I don't have the money to get it for her. When she sees sweets in other children's hands, she asks me to have one for herself, but I can't buy it for her.

I am unable to satisfy her wishes. I feel I am a very bad mother, because I gave birth to her but now I can't give her anything she wants.

I didn't choose this situation. I didn't want to be in this prison of Moria. It is something that fate chose for me.

But you are able to help. You can choose. You can take our hands and stand beside us. God gives to one and takes from another. He tests us. I am sure I will lose this test, because I have children and I will not be patient when I see their feelings.

Don't help me! Help my children! Help our children! They are taking their first steps in life. Please don't let them down. Don't let them feel weak and alone in this huge world.

From a chat with one mother of many in Moria camp...

*Parwana*



## Letter to the World from Moria (No. 5)

*November 2019*

### These eyes bother me!

I am a young girl full of energy, power and self-confidence. Everyday there are a lot of voices inside me inviting me to let this energy out. BUT I am in Moria, between thousands of unclean eyes, that are looking to my body and not to my soul. These eyes bother me. I cannot play volleyball. I cannot even just walk straight down one path. My head should be down. When I am crossing the road it is as difficult as passing the borders for me.

200 metres to the toilets. 400 metres to the food queue. Again 400 metres back. During this distance there are hundreds of eyes looking at me.

Girl-molesting is common, it is daily. Even when they disturb us, we are not supposed to answer them. We are not supposed to turn around. We cannot say: 'Don't follow me! Stop bothering me!'

While washing my clothes I feel ashamed, because boys are looking at me. I cannot look back at them, because they will misunderstand. So all places for sport are used only by boys, all playgrounds are used only by boys. And we are locked inside.

Even men of my father's age look at my body. I don't know where I am. This doesn't look like Europe here. When I was at school, I learned that Europe is the mother of freedom, but I am living in the middle of an eye of violence. There are eyes everywhere. There is freedom nowhere. I am a prisoner here and this is the jail. I will not be able to forget these memories.

Instead of playing with other girls, I have to stay inside. Instead of walking proudly, I should walk with my eyes turned down. I am forced to feel shame and fear.

See, I am actually like you. I am thirteen years old. I am a young girl. But I have to wear a scarf because they say my hair is a source of their lust. Why should I cover my head because they cannot control themselves? Why should I cover my head at all? Why must I be limited and punished? I am a human being but they are looking at me like animals, like I am their prey. I am afraid of these wolves. I am afraid of losing my honour, and their respect and I start feeling bad just because of my gender.

But it's enough! Stand up girls! Stand up women! We are not their objects of lust! We are not the prey of wolves! We should shout out that we want to be safe! We want our rights! We want to look up!

*Parwana*

P.S. I am sorry for all Moria's girls who suffer the same, and especially for my sisters.

## Letter to the World from Moria (No. 6)

November 2019

### I am a volunteer translator

I am the father of two children. I am the husband of a woman full of emotions. And above all, I am a human being. It is only one aspect of my current situation, that I am also a refugee, one among thousands of others.

Every day, I work for hours to help people access services and solve their problems. Every day, exhausted, I run 900m distance to eat lunch in a hurry, and quickly come back to continue to help more people.

On these days that I am helping, my wife shoulders all the housekeeping responsibilities alone: she looks after the children, waits in endless lines to get some food for us all, washes clothes, makes some order in our abode. She does all these things with pleasure, so that I can help translate the troubles of the people standing in the sun for hours, in need of someone to communicate on their behalf.

What happens to our children when she needs to go away from our tent and leaves them in our neighbor's tent? Are they safe? Will they not be bothered by someone? Do they miss us? Such questions torture me during the day.

Today, I am sorry that my name is father. I am sorry that I cannot be the father I want to be, or the good husband I want to be. I try to be a good father, and I try to help all the others who suffer in the same conditions like us.

Today, while I was translating the symptoms of a patient for a doctor, a familiar sound of crying reached my ears. I did not have the heart to leave my work half done and check for the person belonging to that voice. So patiently, I continued, trying to keep my attention on the words I had to translate. Yet, that familiar sound set off an explosion in my brain. Finally, when I was needed no more, stressed-out and anxious, I approached the door.

What I had feared, a few minutes before, was indeed true. That was the sound of my wife's crying as she tried to come inside to see the doctor. In her arms, there was our daughter, unconscious. The girl had been vomiting a lot in the tent, she explained, and when they started out for the clinic she fainted. The guard advised me that she should have taken our daughter to Doctors without Borders (MSF). But I wasn't able to open my mouth to utter the words.

The sight of my wife's eyes, now blood-shot, and the sight of my listless daughter in her arms left me speechless and my mind blank. I could not even explain that she was my wife. Only when she started suddenly to shake, did I come back to myself. So I turned to the nurse and did what I did for all the other patients: I described what had happened. The nurse went to have a look, only to tell us that it would have been better to bring her earlier. How could they have come all that distance faster? Did she not know how difficult our living conditions were? When she went to examine our child, I too went back to my work. I didn't want people to stay waiting while sick like my child, in that bad weather.

**When my work finished, we started out for our tent: my wife, my daughter and me. Feeling a bit better, my little girl lifted herself and asked for a juice. But ...**

**The UNHCR, the European Union and Greece get thousands of Euros every day. Despite that, they do not hire enough translators to help sick people in clinics inside the camp of Moria and in the big hospital. Lack of translators, even in emergencies, is one of people's most common problems.**

To rely on migrant volunteer translators is shameful. Europe should feel shame. When even in its own hospitals, nurses speak no English, how can they expect it from people who come from places where many kids have no access to proper education?

*Parwana*

p.s. Thanks to the father, husband, human being, volunteer translator, who shared his story and who happens to be a refugee today!

## Letter to the World from Moria (No. 7)

*November 2019*

### For a bread – for life

Life normally has ups and downs, but my life has always been flat. I have been trapped in a deep valley.

I am getting close to my life's end. At an age when every old woman needs to rest, I push my heart to work and earn money for my husband who suffers from heart problems and for our son.

Yet, instead of taking care of my husband's sickness, we must first prove his illness, they say. Our words don't count, but only papers. Do we need to take out his heart to show he is ill?

After many medical tests we undertook with many difficulties, they told us that his illness should be certified by the doctors of the big hospital. The name of his sickness has to be written in words on a paper. They didn't tell us, who will cover his transportation costs to go to town? Of course no one will!

### **When my husbands' heart suffered, I desired my death as I could not help with not even a cent in my pocket ...**

Days passed. I decided to build a tandoor (traditional oven) to bake bread and sell it. I thought, I could purchase the necessary ingredients by borrowing some money from one of our relatives, who had a cash card. Just fifty cents, that's all I needed! I touched the fifty cents and my old hands were shaking. Not just because of my old age. Not just because of my worry for my sick husband.

They shook at the thought of the thousand year old olive tree that would burn in my tandoor. I trembled at the idea of the axe reaching the old tree. I could feel it crying out. Yet, I need fire to bake my bread...

**But it is the rule of nature: eat or be eaten.**

How many troubles have I faced in hope of today's bread to cure my husband? And I need a cure too. My heart burns at the thought of the felled burning trees. But I must ignore my heart, I must take care of my old husband. **I must bake the bread!**

With my old hands I shall prepare dough. Dough needs powerful arms, but my arms are weak and shaking. I will do it! I will wake up at 4:00 am! First, I will read my prayers. Then I will start the dough. Flour, oil, salt, yeast and water. I will mix them all together. And then, I will let the dough rest. Once raised, I will cut out small shapes and let them rest again. By 7:00 am the pieces will be ready for the tandoor.

My son walks far away into the hills to collect dry wood and start the fire. Oh, how the old trees turn into ashes. My son, instead of going to school, will go around trying to sell the bread when it's ready. From the early morning until the late evening he will call people to buy it. There are a lot of bakeries nowadays in Moria and selling is very difficult.

**Hundreds of steps, hundreds of movements, a lot of sweat in respect of life, in respect of the bread and in respect of the trees.**

This is our situation and this is how we spend our days. No one knows about it. No one can see. I have always been in the flat valley. No ups in my life. My voice, my cries will never be heard. They are old and weak. My shaking hands will be never held by a stronger hand. At this age, they still have to hold my family.

I want to be a friend of nature, not its enemy. I want to pass my last days with my family in rest, to have some comfort, to sit for days in the shadow of the trees, not to burn them. But life is very ruthless. Sometimes we people are obliged to do things we don't want to do. See what life forces us to do...

**What if someone in this world would hold my hands, so I could become an ally of nature walking away from the deep valleys, up to the mountains and the sun?**

*Parwana*

## Letter to the World from Moria (No. 8)

November 2019

### My pen won't break, but borders will

I didn't know that in Europe people get divided into the ones with passports and the ones without. I didn't know that I would be treated as 'a refugee', a person without papers, without rights. I thought we escaped from emergencies, but here our arrival is considered an emergency for the locals. I thought our situation in the camp is an emergency, but in Europe the meaning of emergency for people like 'us' is to be dead.

In the conditions we live, exposed to heat in summer and rainfalls in winter, in the middle of rubbish, dirt and sewage water, unsafe in permanent stress and fear facing the violence of the European Asylum System in this small world of 15,000 people – we are all emergency cases.

In fact, in Moria, most arrived already with injuries in their souls and sometimes on their bodies. But here everyone gets ill, also the healthy, and our situation turns our sicknesses into emergencies very fast.

Consider the story behind life in Moria hotspot: having spent days, weeks or months walking up and down hills, over rocks and in between trees, we live in a forest. Standing in queues for hours. Lost between what we think of as protection and what they create to hinder us reaching safety.

In Europe we become like ping pong balls. The authorities shoot us from one office to another, back and forth without ending and without understanding what, where, why – which makes our situation worse and worse. Even the

'success story' of finally receiving a residence permit cannot end the looks of discrimination we have to live with every day.

We are not another quality of people; another class of humans; another kind. We are different people with a thousand different stories. What unites us is that we had to leave our homes.

So stop treating us differently. Stop lying and pretending that people are safe here. Stop saying Europe is a better place, when it is only better for some and not even accessible for others.

We are not treated as part of Lesvos' population, like Greeks, like Europeans. Our destiny depends on a bureaucrat's decision, on the economic value of a political decision in favour of migration or not, on the political mood dominant in the continent, on European strategies and plans. It is not built on the foundation of 'us' and 'you' being one kind.

I am a girl in a tent and I am thinking about this world as the days won't pass by and I am waiting for permission to leave this place.

**My pen wont break until we end this story of inequality and discrimination among human kind. My words will always break the borders you built.**

*Parwana*

## Letter to the World from Moria (No. 9)

*November 2019*

### I am mother

I am the mother of three children and the wife of a sick husband. He has a hernia on his backbone. He cannot walk. Neither should he get tired. So, I must look after our entire family on my own.

I am a woman, softer than flowers, but this life makes me harder than rocks.

Every day, as the sun rises, my mission starts. I wake up at 5 am. I spread the blanket over my children. Then I go to get food. I walk 800 meters to the food line. The line starts at 6:30 am., but I want to be up front, the first one among a thousand women.

All this waiting for just 5 cakes and one liter of milk, which I suspect is mixed with water.

My boy has a kidney infection for five years now. He cannot tolerate hunger. I must go back as fast as I can.

Once back, I gather all the blankets and spread them on the tent's floor.

I sweep in front of my tent. With my own hands I made a broom from tree branches.

I wet the soil with water to prevent the dust and dirt from coming inside.

I am barely finished when, once again, I must run to the food line to take lunch. The queue starts at 11:30 am although they distribute the food at 13:00 pm. So the whole waiting process, in unbearable conditions, starts for me again. In the line for hours, I do not know what happens to my children: Are they well? Are they safe? Has my son's pain started?

We have been here for 200 days. And every week, we eat the same food – repetitive, tasteless, with no spices, little salt and oil. Three times a week beans, once meatballs, once chicken and once rice with sausage – we don't know for sure if it is halal. But I force my children to eat so they won't stay hungry.

Securing meals is only one of my tasks. I must also wash my family's clothes. As my children are outside all day, their clothes get really dirty. Trying to clean the stains my hands get all chapped, the skin cracks. I need to rub them with oil every night.

I hang the clothes and, tiredly, I walk, once more, to the line for dinner – dinner only by name. Dry bread, one tomato and one egg. We must wet the bread to chew it. This is no dinner. When we have nothing to eat, we have to eat onion with bread (it's hard for children but we try to eat it cheerfully).

When my day finishes, I am really exhausted. But I do not want my family to notice. I fix my face. It should show no sadness, no fatigue. I hide my chapped hands from my husband and my children.

Sometimes, I don't make it to the food line, because of the long queues I must stand in to visit the doctors. I go there at 7:00 am, but the process is very slow and, usually, every patient takes about 20 minutes inside. Then, the situation of my child gets worse than it normally is, because of his exposure to the sun and the polluted air outside. We need a specific permit to go and get some drinking water.

Waiting in a queue for four hours, without any toy or game, is very hard for children. It is equally hard for pregnant women like me. I know my husband is not happy when he sees me trying to manage on my own every day. But there is no other way. We don't have anyone to help. Only ourselves. And he cannot.

I am my family's strength, their courage, their hope. If I lose hope, who will stand by them? Who will help them? No one.

When the sun sets and darkness spreads, I am filled with fear. I fear also when it becomes cloudy and it rains. I fear the wind, I fear the cold. How will I protect my family? With what will I protect them, when we have nothing?

When you don't have resources, what are you going to do? I collect the blankets from the floor and spread cardboard instead. The blankets are our covers at night and the carpets during the day.

I am a mother and a wife. My children are the pieces of my heart and my husband is my blood. They are all I have in my life. But who am I for myself?

I don't have time to even see myself in the mirror. I don't have time to comb my hair once a day. I don't have time to brush my teeth in 24 hours. I can't take care of my skin. I can't be a woman.

I am content to sacrifice myself to make a comfortable life for my children and my love, my husband. Because I am a woman. It is my choice to be like this. Life is hard here and there is nowhere good to go.

I was given the documents to go to the mainland. But I canceled my ticket. On the mainland, the authorities will put us in a hotel, far from hospitals or clinics that we depend on. What am I going to do there with my sick child and my husband and myself pregnant? We need (specialised) doctors. We need protection and care.

I am sorry that I don't have time to speak with my family as a mother, as a wife and as a friend. Because I don't have more power. I can't do more in 24 hours, than bring food, go to clinics, stand in lines.

I have had enough. I can't continue anymore. Truly, if I didn't have my children, I would have committed suicide. I live only because it is worth living for them. And now, I am pregnant and I carry one more life inside me.

I am one for myself, but four for my family. Soon I will be five ...

*Parwana*

p.s. For all the mothers!

## Letter to the World from Moria (No. 10)

*December 2019*

### Searching for protection in a world of war

Where is safety?

In a camp with 14,000 refugees coming from different places on earth living in inhuman conditions one piled upon the other, the authorities can do very little to protect us. In fact, the miserable conditions they force us to live in, the inhuman laws and rules they subject us to create a small world of violence – a form of systematic violence against all of us.

If you live this violence day by day, you become part of it. In the end we humans, who are currently refugees in your Europe, must defend ourselves, our tents and our families against a generalised violence from above, but also from all sides. This violence can come from any side now.

Where is safety?

If you live in conditions not fit for animals, violent conditions, then you can become violent yourself, even if you share the same pain.

I feel powerless against this violence. I feel it crawling in our veins. I don't want to become a part of this. I feel shame, when I see anger growing between people who suffer the same pain and shame when I feel anger rising inside me.

Instead of establishing friendly relations between each other as oppressed people that face the same discrimination, we become part of the reason people have

fear. We escaped war, but it seems we are in war again. There is no way out. This is the war to survive the jungle called Europe.

It is so painful to witness women and children unable to sleep, afraid of violence. Their men must stay awake to guard in front of the tents, to protect their families all night. A piece of nylon, a zipper separates them from any intruder.

Today when, more than ever before, we need each other, we are afraid of each other. We don't know from which side we could be attacked. We don't know who is a friend. We have lost trust in life and people because there is no system to protect us and to make us feel like humans among humans.

Today, instead of curing our wounds hand in hand, we put salt on each other's wounds. We are trapped in a desert where no one will help us and no one will ask where we are.

I am responsible of myself. Within this violence, I have to take the first step not to become part of this. I have to be critical and start the change from within, as no help will ever come from outside. We have to start from ourselves, from our families, our communities, to stop the violence and to rise up against this system.

I don't want to break. I don't want to feel shame for my actions. I will stand firm against violence and answer it with a raised head and open fists. We crossed thousands of kilometres to find a life in safety, but it seems that there is no security here for us.

I stopped believing that we will find a peaceful place. We have to find peace inside ourselves and withstand the war going on outside. When violence erupts in Moria, when the police beat us, when people riot or even fight, we cannot count on anyone for protection. We have to find the solution to beat the monster.



Can you imagine yourself living in these conditions, having survived war, facing daily violence? Could you control yourself, stay calm and create peace while your fate was uncertain for months and years while trapped in Moria?

Living with such anxiety and insecurity, we people feel permanent shock; we experience panic and trauma daily. We inflict injuries on ourselves and others. There are even kids hurting themselves and trying to commit suicide.

Where is safety?

Clubs, tear-gas, wooden sticks, stones and knives ... Fists and kicks. Our shields of protection are naked hands and our dignity. All our wealth is our blankets and our few warm clothes. Fear of losing even these keeps us near our tent 24 hours a day. But even if we decided to move away, where could we go? During the day, the knowledge that darkness is always near and fear of violence shakes our body.

For how long?

Wolves hunt in the darkness of night and the shepherds look after their flock. But here the wolves are the shepherds, the shepherds are the sheep and sheep turn into wolves.

No sleep. No dreams.

Where is safety?

How long are we going to search for safety by holding guns in our hands? These hands, which long for a pen not a gun!

**Open your doors for our lives!**

*Parwana*

## Letter to the World from Moria (No. 11)

*December 2019*

### Life of a Transgender person

I am in Moria Camp.

Being transgendered means not to be of female or male sex, neither man nor woman – but of transgender sex. In a society like Afghanistan, being a transgender person is like being an extra-terrestrial, landing on earth from outer space. In Afghanistan people think of sex as binary: only female and male are considered as “normal” genders.

In Afghanistan I used false names. I am Mina. This name gives the understanding that I am a girl. Yet, every day, my whole being, my soul screams: “I am not a girl! Don’t cover yourself with these clothes.”

I was born, in 1992, in Mazaresharef, the western province of Afghanistan. Being a girl in such a society carries guilt. Being a transgender person born as a girl carries double guilt. So, when I realised that I was not really a girl, my life became a nightmare. I felt myself separate from everyone, not belonging to any of the dominant sexes. Although I had a female body, I wanted to be with boys, behave like a boy. Playing with them, learning with them, speaking with them was pleasant for me.

When I was little, my family allowed me to do more or less what I wanted. But as soon as my female body developed, they didn’t allow me to be what I wanted to be, as I wanted to be. They were always thinking about their reputation and honour and not about what I wanted. When I turned 18, I felt like a prisoner in

the jail of my female body and I couldn't tolerate wearing girl's clothes anymore. So, I decided to take off my hijab and be what I wanted to be.

I loved one of my classmates and I was with her all the time. She didn't know everything about me. She just knew my deep feelings for her and she thought that I was like all girls. Sometimes, she felt uncertain and would ask if I was ok. Soon, I decided to speak with her and with my family.

First, I told her all my feelings, that I really loved her and wanted to be with her all my life. She was shocked, but she accepted me and wanted me to be what I wanted to be, not what others wanted me to be.

When I then spoke with my family, they told me that they would kill me if I did not do what they wanted. They also told me that there was a suitor asking for me and that he and his family were coming the next day to visit to ask for my hand. I should just dress like a lady and that was it!

I thought ok, I will do what they ask me to do. I will get married, but I won't have any relation with him. Relations need feelings and I had no such feelings for him or any men. I thought, I will divorce him after two months, I promise!

I did the opposite. I went to a barber and cut off my hair like a boy. Then I wore a t-shirt with a pair of jeans and went home.

My older sister was shocked to see me like that and told me to change my clothes immediately and wear a scarf. "Otherwise", she told me, "our father will kill you".

I put a scarf over my short brown hair and wore a skirt over my jeans.

The guests came and I got married, but I had no relation with him. We were together for two months and then I divorced. When my father learned that I divorced, he beat me up. My eyes became black and purple. "What is this,"

he shouted. "Do you want me to kill you? What did I do wrong to you that you behave like this? What did you want, that I didn't give you", he shouted and continued to beat me. "You didn't give me my right," I answered. "Did you ever ask me what I wanted? Did you ever ask how I felt? Did you ever ask how I wanted to be? You know nothing about me," I went on. "You were always thinking about your reputation and honour, not about your child."

And as I was speaking my voice stopped. I was sobbing. "Your crying won't change anything," he cried, "I will decide for you." He threw me out of the house and that was the last time I saw him.

It's about six years that I have not had any contact with my family. Not one single call. My mother died some years ago and my two sisters got married. I went to them.

I couldn't stay long with my sister. Her husband, my brother in law, was not happy with me and his behaviour towards me became worse and worse. I understood that I could not stay there any longer.

One day, my bother-in-law called me into the room and told me: "We have made a decision about you. As you know, our financial situation is not good and we cannot spend money on you. We will tell you our decision tomorrow." I felt totally stressed out. I didn't know what he was going to decide and how things were going to be. That night was like a nightmare for me. I couldn't sleep. Yet, I was pleased with my new style. I was daydreaming all night long in front of the mirror, brushing my short hair and changing my hair parting

The next day, the sun was shining and I was still daydreaming. I wanted to become a lawyer to protect the rights of people, make the world a just world. But they burned my dreams, they burned my child and my adult dreams. They burned my hopes.

In the morning my brother in law asked me: "Will you change yourself?"

"No", I replied.

"Won't you change your decision?"

“No!!!”, I insisted. “I know who to be and how to be. Everyone has the right to choose.”

“We are not in Europe, never forget it”, he shouted. “I live in society, with many other people. Every day I hear them speak about you. Their words bother me. I don’t have any problem with you working in the municipality, or you going to university, but I cannot tolerate that people speak about you and us.”

I was living with my sister for 3,5 years. But, after this conversation with my brother-in-law, I decided to leave them and not to make them uncomfortable anymore.

I was sad, hopeless, upset and disturbed. I realised that I was alone. Alone in all respects. Totally alone in the whole world. I didn’t know what to do and where to go. I cried, and cried. I cried continuously.

I went to my classmate who had promised to give me money to escape from Afghanistan and become free – free to spin in the air for all to see me. No need to hide anymore.

I found a family that also wanted to go Germany. So I took the money from my classmate and I went with them to Farah, then to Nemroz, the nearest city to Pakistan’s border. Then we went to Pakistan, to a city of thieves, war and deception. When we were there, I didn’t know whether I should dress like a girl and wear a hijab. I thought it would be more tolerant and open-minded than Mazar-e-Sharif. But when we arrived at Nemroz, I understood that I should cover my whole body. Even then, everyone was looking at us as if we “women” were guilty of a crime. Then I understood that they were looking at us, because our men wore t-shirts and trousers, clothes very different from theirs, since they were all wearing long dresses and Tomban (traditional trousers). So our men changed their style and borrowed a Pirahsn and Tomban for themselves.

We were eight nights at the Pakistan border and this was the most difficult part of our journey. One night three men wanted to invade our tent while we were

sleeping, but fortunately our men stopped them and had a fight with them. They left, but, after that, we couldn’t sleep all night.

We reached Iran, a country of racism and hatred, between Shiites and Sunnis, Iranians and Afghans. When we were there, we spent three days in the mountains. The weather was very cold, but not one of the smugglers helped the families that had children. I felt very sorry for the family of that baby who fell from the mountain and died.

Finally we arrived to Turkey.

The UNHCR helped me a lot in every respect. When they learned that I wanted to change my gender, they tried to collect money for the operation. Unfortunately, there was no doctor to perform such an operation. They suggested that, I should go to Europe.

I spent two and half years in Turkey. After six months, I got a money card, and every month, I took 7 hundred and fifty Lire from PTT. But as I had to pay for rent, water, gas and electricity that money wasn’t enough for me. So I was peddling everyday at the corners of the streets. I do the same here too, just to earn 5 €.

It’s so hard when somebody asks me, how many siblings I have. How can I say 6, when I have not been with them for so long? I share nothing with them.

Isn’t it wrong?

It’s very hard when somebody is looking at me strangely and I sense that he or she wants to ask me who and what I am.

I cannot say anything. I just hide myself, hide my gender, because of my feelings and I hide my feelings, because of others.

**I passed the borders not to be hidden!**

**I risked my life not to be hidden!**

**I lost everything not to be hidden!**

I did all of that in order to live in freedom, and I will continue my struggle until I achieve my freedom. Freedom for ever.

I hope that here I will be free!

*Parwana*

## **Letter to the World from Moria (No 12)**

*December 2019*

**I am mother Earth**

I have existed for billions of years. Every century I raised new generations, but I have never been as proud of myself as I am today and at the same time as sad and disappointed as I am today.

Today, I stand tip-top on some incredible advances and discoveries achieved in this world. Yet, it looks like my residents are returning back to old false thoughts, thoughts thousands of years old. Thoughts of egoism, thoughts of greed, thoughts that make you fight between each other, that made you build borders in order not to share between your kind or other creatures.

I am the mother of you all. I belong equally to all people. You can all live on me. So what are these borders for that you created? Why don't you open your doors to each other? Why don't you get rid of racism and come together to sit at one table?

We are a family. Don't you realise? Is it possible for one child to ask another child to give him back his mother? Is she mother to just one child? What mother can be happy to see one of her kids happy and wealthy and another poor and miserable? What family can draw borders between its members? You are all earth's people, how can one have more and another less?

You want to conquer other people, other countries, other planets. Have you pleased me, to now think that you will please other planets? Did you look after me so now you think that you can look after other planets?

Today, more than any times in the past, I need protection from you people and people need protection from each other. Instead of looking after me, you want to conquer me, you think that I belong to just a few of you. You don't want to care and to share ...

Don't you need me all in order to survive? I am soil and water for you, and if the goal is to live and not to turn others into slaves, get a piece of land for yourself and give a glass of water to others.

Every day, with your growing greed I fall into more trouble and you lose yourselves. Your attempt to conquer me burns forests into ashes, forests that have grown over thousands of years nurturing us with oxygen. Seas turn red with human blood, and lands with thousand year old histories, turn into dry sand. Your pressure on me is ever growing. With every century of your "progress", I get closer to the end of my life. You want to exploit me, but don't you realise that you deplete me every day, that you end my days and yours.

Why aren't you content with what you already have? Why don't you protect the treasures in your hands? Your life would be terribly short if I belonged to one man only, if you were alone. If you continue the same way, you won't be able to have me for more than 100 years more. I will die. You will die.

So, let the people see the grasses in future, let them touch the lawns, let them smell fresh air, let them climb the mountains and swim in the seas. Don't force the future generations to spend all their days and lives with masks! My ozone layer is being destroyed. I cannot escape harmful radiations anymore, all because of you! Every day by making more nuclear power, by building more factories, I come closer to the end of my life.

Your egoism and greed is my death. But my death will be your destruction. It will affect all of you. Every day more species of herbs, plants and animals become extinct. More humans lose their lives fighting in front of the borders of your greed and pride.

People were all born with many hopes, but not feeling the joy of life, they lost everything. When I see that in one part of me, people die from hunger and children are threatened by malnutrition, and in another part of me, people go under surgery's blades to lose weight, I feel anger.

I am sorry for the countries where people live below the poverty line. I should also say: I am sorry for the residents, of those parts of a country, living under the poverty line, while just next to them others live jovially. I feel pain for those who work in their own territories for other people and give their own natural wealth away for a few cents.

It pains me to think that, millions of years from now, the inhabitants of other planets would call Earth "the planet of the greedy species", and amazed from the horror, they will look at the destruction caused by atomic wars and missile weapons.

You have closed the borders, when in one of my hemispheres population density is low, while in my other hemisphere it is very high. The rich eat more, the poor face hunger more.

Are the rich countries of the world not responsible for that? The nations, the presidents, the politicians, the businessmen? Have they not taken away all the natural resources? Should they not feel shame? They don't. Instead the rulers, the real thieves, just give "development aid" and present themselves as benefactors to our world. They interfere in the politics of other countries, they throw down governments and start wars to "save" others.

In a period when Europe has decreasing birthrates and schools and universities close down because of a lack of students, in Asia and Africa and in most other continents, thousands of schools are destroyed by bombs and students are deprived of education.

In an era when generations should deliberate together to get to know and understand each other, people have raised borders higher and thousands die as a result, including children, pregnant women, old men.

One day from the Aegean Sea, the Mediterranean Sea, the North Sea terrible screams will rise – screams to break down the borders. I have never built borders to keep someone out. Nature has always outstretched a friendly hand to all – so hold it tight.

In an era when you still want to visit Mars, I have never constructed a border. You were created as free people and freedom is what you deserve. I need life not borders. No one needs borders.

Come together to find new ways to protect life and dignity. I am getting old and I cannot tolerate fumes of chemical factories, atomic power's gases, missiles, atomic bombs.

Let one day of life be a gift for yourself and give one day also for all the others. I turned centuries around the sun to give you life, but, today, when I need you to listen to me, don't turn your back on me. Earth doesn't want borders. Earth wants people united.

One can wander to the East or the West, to the North or the South, but where home is, it is the best.

*Parwana*

## Letter to the World from Moria (No. 13)

*January 2020*

### I am the mother of two sick babies

Every mother raises her baby being proud of it from the first day. When she kisses her baby, her baby kisses her back, and this is pure happiness for her. When the child grows, she is watching how it plays with others. She watches it grow and develop. These are the joys of a mother.

I have raised my two children in the hardest conditions life can offer. I spent every day praying for them. But while the body of my four year old girl grew, her brain did not follow. And the same happened to my boy.

I love my children. But society humiliated us for them being different. I will never forget that everybody expected my husband to get married again, because I gave birth to mentally disabled babies.

I didn't even know that I was getting married. I was so small, getting married was for me like playing with my dolls, and it was the same for all other girls of my very young age.

When I started to learn about life as a couple, I realised that I was pregnant and when I hugged my Mariam\* (names changed) for the first time, I also became aware of people's talk – mostly the people closest to me. They called my baby "handicapped", "abnormal", and those words aggrieved me.

To find medical help for the growth problems of our child and escape the stigmatisation and painful talk around our family, we decided to escape, first to Iran and after to Turkey.

We tried to find appropriate treatment for our daughter for four years. For the first three years, no one could tell us the reason for her illness. Finally, they found out, that she had brain damage.

My Mariam ... she is full of emotions, full of love and affection, full of innocence. Her world is simple, but pure. Her view of life is different. Even when humiliating hands rest on her shoulders, she feels that they are innocent, hands full of sympathy.

When I see that she goes near flowers, I become happy that maybe she is getting pleasure from her environment, but then she becomes aggressive to them. Observing her in such scenes feels like thorns piercing my eyes.

Every mother wishes to see her baby crawl, but I couldn't see it, since she was like a dead body in the corner until she became two years old. Every mother wishes to hold her baby's hand and teach her how to walk, but I touched her weak joints and she whined and cried in pain.

### **Hey mothers on this earth! Hey you who have children!**

I swear that I raised this girl 9 months in my belly. I swear that I desired death while giving birth. I passed a long period after her birth, eating dry bread with water, praying that she becomes better, that she becomes a happiness for us and happy herself.

I have lived with such pain. The Turkish doctors told us that there was no hope to treat Mariam.

And, then, in Turkey, another seed was planted and started growing. I have grown Amir★ full of hope. Although looking at Mariam made me cry every day, my husband, cleared away my tears, put his hand on my belly and gave me hope. How many nights I cried for the health of my kids ... but in this inhumane world, my soul's screams haven't been heard.

This mother, after 9 months of carrying her baby and 6 days of labour pains, was told once again the same news: she is having an unhealthy baby.

I passed two years full of hope, telling myself that maybe it was not true, that things might change. The doctors in Turkey told us that he had the same problem as Mariam. His brain will not grow and the muscles of his body will not work well. However, there was a treatment for him, especially because he was smaller than Mariam, but that treatment was not possible in Turkey. For that we needed to move on to a European country.

We had been living as refugees in Turkey for four years. We were beggars at everybody's door. Every day we visited the doctors. However, we didn't know their language, and we didn't have an interpreter. We wandered for hours and days to find the hospitals as we didn't know the addresses, only to understand, in the end, that we were in Turkey for nothing. We saw that all doors were closed to us. So we gathered everything, held our children's hands and started our migration towards Europe.

### **Now we ask ourselves: Is this really Europe? Is this the continent of hope? Where is that bright light that we came here to find for our children?**

No! Here our heart's light didn't turn on. Europe turned our hopes off and we are trapped in darkness.

For four months now every day we go to the doctors in Mytilene. It seems that our babies are pictures, that can be diagnosed by a quick look. Without having carried out any test, they tell us that our babies don't have any problems. It is as if you go to the doctor and tell him that you have a headache and the doctor tells you, "where is your pain, I cannot see it".

No one answers our questions. We are like ping pong balls to them. They throw us from one hospital to another for nothing.

If you have parents, if you are a father or mother, if you love someone around you, you will understand us. You will understand how hard it is to see a seed of your body, growing to become a human that is just alive but doesn't live. Every day looking at our children's situation we wish to die.

We didn't come here for money or luxuries but for the doctors. For us just having a nest to protect us from the cold and to live with our healthy children would be enough.

In search of a nest only ...

*Parwana*

p.s. Thanks to my friend who shared her story with me. I hope she will find what she is looking for!

## Letter to the World from Moria (No. 14)

Wouldn't you shout, to the world, your total disbelief?

What would you say to the world if, instead of who you are now, you were one of those 20,000 thousand homeless refugees in the camp of Moria, that the winter turns into a hell and the summer into the Sahara desert?

Wouldn't you shout, to the world, your total disbelief?

And what would you say if, after days of walking through mountains, forests, plains, deserts and between valleys, without food and water, in cold weather, without blankets and warm clothes, yet full of hope about your reaching Europe, you found yourself, instead, behind Moria's jail door, with your dreams of sleeping in a warm and safe place shattered?

Wouldn't you shout, to the world, your total disbelief?

And what would you say if, awake at night, feeling cold and afraid, you heard the crying of your very sick child and realised how little you could do to save it – begging for 2 euros to buy a bus ticket to the hospital and, when then, having to wait endless hours for someone to take care of your dying baby?

Wouldn't you shout, to the world, your total disbelief?

And what would you say if, in the winter, you had to endure, with no real shelter, the cold, the rain, the open running sewage, the piles of rubbish, praying for the sun that seemed never to rise? What would you say, if your shoes sank in the mud and you had to pick them up with freezing hands?



Wouldn't you shout, to the world, your total disbelief?

And what would you say if, in spite of your fear of rape, harassment, thieves, you had to go out of your tent, for your daily, natural needs?

Wouldn't you shout, to the world, your total disbelief?

And what would you say if, homeless, without a husband, having lost your son in the waves, your hair white and your body weak, you had to queue, in rainy and stormy weather, together with 5000 more women, for a mouthful of food?

Wouldn't you shout, to the world, your total disbelief?

And what would you say, if you worshiped the sun, pleading that he comes out just for a bit to warm your children's bed and their freezing feet, in the cold of winter?

Wouldn't you shout, to the world, your total disbelief?

And what would you do, if you saw girls selling their bodies for money?

Wouldn't you spit on the world? And what would you say, if you had to live in this jail of Moria for more than one year, your only "crime" being your search for safety and for that precious blue stamp that recognises you as a refugee and makes your dream come true.

Wouldn't you shout, to the world, your total disbelief?

And what would you say, if simple things like heating and electricity (necessary to charge your mobile phone and speak five minutes with your family, who want to learn whether you are alive or lost in the waves of the sea), a warm blanket, a shelter, a mouthful of warm food and a cup of tea become an impossible wish to be had only in your dreams?

Wouldn't you shout, to the world, your total disbelief?

And what would you say, if you picked up a fistful of soil from Moria's ground and see it became weaker than ash, because every night more than 20,000 homeless people shout their disbelief to the world? Only a heart can warm another heart, the only source of heating for hearts is another heart. What will your action be? What will your words be?

Wouldn't you too, shout, to the world, your total disbelief?



## I am Parwana Amiri,

I was born in Herat province in Afghanistan. I have four sisters and two brothers and I am the fifth eldest child in my family. We had to flee due to the political problems my father had. One and half years ago we became refugees. After crossing the borders through Pakistan, Iran and Turkey we arrived on Lesbos Island in Greece. We reached Moria refugee camp on 18. September 2019.

When we arrived in Moria and I saw everybody's daily problems, I couldn't sit aside and not do anything. I have a deep belief in words and their effects. I knew that using words to show the reality is the only way to make change.

After becoming active in the camp and starting to build trusting relationships with people, I began writing articles about our living conditions – my story and theirs. Stories that had never been heard or read in the media. Stories that never got out of this overcrowded camp.

You can lose yourself at any point in time in your life, but you must stay strong when others need you. This is what I could do for myself and others with my own resources. I stayed strong because I was doing something that made sense in this senseless jungle. I was motivated to hold my pen and keep writing for us all in Moria – for we all need to continue the struggle.

During this short time, under these terrible conditions that no human deserves, I did a lot. I worked with “Waves of Hope for Future”, which is a self-organized school and I participated in the “Refocus Media Lab”.

I could find my way with solidarity people.

I wish for peace in the world. I wish for a world without borders. I want a world where children don't die from malnutrition and women don't die from violence. I wish to live in an equal world. I wish for a world where no one is poor and no one is rich. Our dreams will become reality only if we communicate and I want to be one connector bringing people together and even continents. I wish for peace and safety for all people.

I wish strong hearts for all those that are forced to escape their homes, to not lose their path when facing hardships. The hardest stones are formed in the high heat of volcanoes.

*Parwana Amiri*









