

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT FROM TAMANA AYAZI AND MARCEL METTELSIEFEN

TAMANA: Zarifa was quite well known in Afghanistan because she was one of the mayors. What made her special was the province itself; it was a territory divided by the government of Afghanistan, the Republic, and the Taliban from long ago. . . . When Marcel and I decided to do this [film], we didn't want to just do a profile piece. We thought we needed to explore more layers of what was happening in Afghanistan and the various divides. There was an opportunity to cover both sides of the country as the divide continued to grow and accelerate. . . . When [Zarifa] talked about how she was not accepted as a mayor because she's a woman, I could reflect on this in my story on so many different levels. She had to leave the country and then I had to leave the country. I'm trying to help the people out and she's trying to help the people. We used to be part of something bigger in the society in Afghanistan. We were trying to change the country to make it a better place for our citizens. Whenever something happens, I tell Zarifa that I'm sorry she has so much responsibility. It's a lot of responsibility to even ask someone to tell your story. She was one of the people who could reflect on it.

My hope is that [after watching this film] people will learn more about Afghanistan because the only thing they know about Afghanistan is a collection of general headlines that don't go beyond surface-level discussions. Corruption. Drug Addiction. But there is so much more than that. I want our international audience to learn more about Afghanistan and the international community to realize how their decisions changed so many lives in Afghanistan. Also, it's not one story, it's so many stories together, so many voices. And I think it's really important for people to understand what we went through and are still going through.

MARCEL: We told [the Taliban] that we wanted to give everybody a voice in this film. Everyone's talking about the Taliban, but almost no one is talking with the Taliban. I don't feel there's anything really cinematic that's been done about the Taliban universe, so we insisted on more than just one visit. We explained we wanted to do something bigger, to cast a protagonist that we would be able to revisit over a certain period of time, and that would be part of the storyline. What was really surprising is that they did not ask for any control or who else we were filming. They didn't ask if they could watch what we were doing. They were very comfortable with their own position. I think it is so unbelievable and tragic what has happened. What is still going on. Afghanistan is suffering one of the most terrible humanitarian crises ever. They are on the sanction list and the only ones who are suffering the sanctions are the people. I think Zarifa is an empowering character to show that we should not forget this country. By breaking this down to an emotional level, where all different characters, even the Taliban, are part of this journey, I think we just hope to make this a little bit more understandable to the public, who do not really understand what's going on in this country and have not seen any stories come out since Kabul fell.

FILM DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

After watching the film, use the following questions to help guide discussion about the issues raised in the film.

1. What compels Zarifa to run for office?
2. What issues are important to Zarifa?
3. What challenges did Zarifa face once becoming Mayor? How did she handle these challenges?
4. How is the Taliban portrayed in the film? Give specific examples.
5. Describe Massoum, Zarifa's driver and bodyguard. How does the relationship between Zarifa and Massoum change over the course of the film?
6. Why does Zarifa leave Afghanistan?
7. What happens to Massoum when Kabul falls?
8. What is life like for the people of Afghanistan under the Taliban regime? What human rights issues are the people facing?
9. Both Tamana and Marcel, the Directors of In Her Hands, emphasized how important it was for them to give voice to multiple perspectives and to tell the real story of Afghanistan, beyond what most people would read in the news headlines. Describe each perspective you see in the film. What is the story that this film tells about Afghanistan? About Zarifa? About the Taliban?
10. What is the responsibility of others towards the people of Afghanistan? How could the international community help to ensure that the people in Afghanistan have their basic human rights? What do you feel your personal responsibility is towards refugees from Afghanistan or the people of Afghanistan? How could you become a human rights defender for refugees in your community or for people still living in Afghanistan?