



**Aaqel\*, 16, Afghanistan**

My name is Aaqel, and I'm 16 years old. On Thursday 9 June this year (2022) I was pushed back from Chios by the Greek police and coastguard.

I'm from Afghanistan, Meydan-Wardak, in the Behsood region.

But I lived in Kabul.

I was a student in grade 11, and also I did social activities. For example, I was a member of Oxygen in Afghanistan, a group that met to work on ways to reduce global warming. I have certificates from that, showing what we did and achieved. It's an important thing and we can all help.

In Kabul, I lived with my family. There were six of us: me, my two sisters, who are eight and 11, my baby brother who is five months old, and my parents.

I fled Afghanistan alone.

I left because my family were under Taliban control, because my father had been a government employee, and one of the President's bodyguards.

The day the Taliban took over Afghanistan, my family and I could not leave Afghanistan, because it was too crowded at Kabul airport, although we tried hard and went to the airport several times but did not succeed.

After that, I decided to go to Europe by another route so that I could continue my education and have a better life and still save my family from the Taliban.

It was a long journey, and it was difficult. It is hard for everyone. We have to walk long distances, and sometimes we cannot use roads. There are mountains and rivers. But for me maybe it was hard as well because I am 16, and I was alone. People are not always kind. I didn't stop anywhere on the journey, except to sleep, and then I walked again.

Even though it was difficult, I had no choice. I left to help my family, and to help us all escape the Taliban, and I had to keep going.

I came to Greece because I need to get to Germany. My uncle is there and I can live with him and finish my education. This is so important.

So, when I got to Izmir, my family spent US\$1,000 for a place on a boat for me to get to Chios. It's a lot of money but it was vital and there is no other way. No-one wants to spend money like this, but no other way is possible.



There were 34 people on the boat, and we travelled in the night-time, on 8 June. The journey was OK. I never travelled by sea before, it was dark and we landed safely, so I think that makes it OK.

We arrived into Chios 7 O'Clock in the morning.

We split into several groups. Twenty-five people walked to the camp, they were all black people, from Africa.

But there was a family with me, they had two small children and the mother was pregnant, they could not walk, so we went to the town to try to get a taxi to the camp. But after 10 minutes the police came and arrested us.

They put us in a small room and we stayed there for many hours, until the night.

They took our possessions, money, papers, phones.

When it was dark, a van arrived. The police put us in handcuffs and pushed us into the van. They took us to the shore, still in handcuffs.

Then, they forced us into a boat. It was about 1am on 9 June.

There were ten of us. They drove us into Turkish waters. They beat us, forced us into an inflatable raft and left us. We never saw their faces. They kept them covered, even while they were hitting us. When they forced us onto the raft, they left on their boat, fast. It looked like a military boat.

We were hurt, because we had been beaten, and we were adrift in the sea. We couldn't ask for help because the police stole our phones. We just floated alone, until the morning came, when thankfully the weather cleared, and eventually, the Turkish police rescued us.

So now, I am in Izmir, Turkey. I don't know anyone here, I have no relatives here, and I cannot go to school or hospital if I get sick, because I have no ID card in Turkey and no way to get one.

I cannot stay here. I have to go to Germany to continue my studies and have a safe life, and to save my family from Afghanistan.

All I want is this. For my family to be safe, and to be with them. After I finish my education, I want to do social charity works, for example working in charities so that I can help people who need help.

I understand that people in some situations are in dire need of help because I am currently in this situation myself.

*\*Aaqel's name has been changed because he is a young person and needs and deserves protection.*

