

A Glorious Gathering of Feminist Warriors: Saving One Extraordinary Afghan Woman

Feminists gathered in New York City to celebrate the rescue of Meena, who escaped the Taliban thanks to women's efforts.



by Phyllis Chesler

In late January of this year, the Biden Administration began “inviting ordinary Americans to help settle Afghan refugees in

America.” Dubbed the “Welcome Corps,” [the initiative](#) asks citizens to support refugees financially and in all other ways e.g. providing food, clothing, secure housing, education, health care (including mental health care), transportation, employment, and hospitality. The new “private sponsorship initiative” experts suggest that at least five people are needed in order to “welcome” and successfully sponsor one Afghan refugee or an Afghan family in America.

I strongly disagree. In the case of my one, adopted Afghan granddaughter, Meena, at least twenty to twenty-five volunteers from around the world were essential in getting Meena and her family out of Kabul; and more volunteers joined our efforts along the way, including new and generous donors, and a new team of pro bono lawyers who are working on Meena’s application for asylum in America.

Some of our initial team’s volunteers, who worked for NGOs or for various European governments, were on salary but were not necessarily reimbursed for their time or efforts in this regard. Some had experience in anti-trafficking work and petitioned their governments to accept our women judges, doctors, lawyers, journalists, business owners, and artists—all of whom were women’s rights activists. We gathered information from American ex-military service members, corporate honchos, and human rights activists. We had a narrow window of opportunity, about six months, until refugees from Ukraine began pouring into Europe.



Once I understood that Meena, a medical school graduate, had also worked in Afghanistan as a researcher and translator for

an American-based professor, I haunted the poor man. Jean-Francois Trani came through brilliantly. Professor Trani obtained a student visa *and* a scholarship for Meena at Washington University in St. Louis—a very fine and a very expensive school. Her scholarship only covers tuition, nothing else, not rent, food, books, computer upgrades, school fees, an expensive mandatory health insurance policy (\$2800.00 per year), toiletries, clothing—just on and on. What one needs in order to live and to devote oneself, full-time to study.

Meena writes:

“I lost my cousin in the latest suicide bomb attack in Kabul. He was the only one working to feed almost ten people in his family. We both believed that going to school and working would change our lives. He was working in a public park making 50 or 100 Afghanis each day. Despite his long hours and poverty, he continued his education. We were both looking for a different future. I was so lucky to get a scholarship. He died with all his dreams. I had a group of feminist women who wanted to save me and my dreams, and they did.”

Mandy Sanghera, a London-based human rights activist and philanthropist, and myself literally worked around the clock for more than six months rescuing 400 other Afghan women. I had a paid assistant who created spreadsheets in order to keep track of the biographies and ID information for at least 100 women and who tried to keep our correspondence on Signal, WhatsApp, and email in order. In fact, Mandy and I are still inundated with pleas for help from Afghan women who are living in hiding and in terror.

One amazing woman (whom I cannot name) got Meena and many others out on planes. Three amazing men and one woman were in charge of food and medicine drops. They also delivered wood in winter and had a network of doctors who delivered babies and did surgical procedures when necessary. One woman served as

Meena's mental health counselor. Another served as her English tutor. Those who read my articles up at 4W contributed money to a war chest which was used primarily by our former lawyer at a time when, unfortunately, the Biden Administration was granting only a handful of Humanitarian Parole applications.



More wonderful women joined us. One, Penny Wilson, donated her frequent flyer miles and her administrative expertise. Another

long-time feminist colleague of mine, a retired professor of Literature, Lilia Milani, pledged to cover Meena's rent for the year. I named some more names in my previous piece [here](#) up at 4W.

Last month, I decided to bring as many members of this team together to finally meet Meena in person in my home. I thought they deserved to know her—and she them. The founder of 4W, MK Fain came—and indeed, 4W is [where I posted almost all my articles](#) and a good number of 4W readers sent funds. We zoomed in Meena's mental health counselor and the woman who got her on the plane, who was in Africa at the time.

The women who gathered were so excited to meet Meena—and she them. They took her sightseeing in Manhattan: On a walking tour of Grand Central Terminal, Rockefeller Center, Times Square—Macy's! I introduced her to my son, daughter-in-law, and granddaughters and *they* took her to the Metropolitan Museum. I think a good time was had by all.

“We need to have an honest conversation about refugee education.”

Penny suggested that we all go around the table, from oldest to youngest, and give Meena one piece of advice. And so we did. Penny brought a multitude of beautiful silk scarves, and we each got to pick one for ourselves. Meena got all the rest.

Mandy writes:

“It was great to see Meena over the holidays, and she was excited to share her grades with me. We talked about how sad it was that girls and women are no longer allowed to go to school in Afghanistan and about the importance of education. I remembered that education is a basic human right. We need to have an honest conversation about refugee education. It potentially has the power to protect refugees from child labor, sexual exploitation, and child marriage, and gives them the skills to lead productive and

independent lives.”

Meena has gotten all “A”s in her classes. She is now working for ten hours a week for a professor and may be allowed to work for a maximum of twenty hours but no more. This may– or may not–cover her food and toiletries.

Below is a [GoFundMe campaign for Meena](#). Please consider making a donation to support her ongoing expenses. It will help all of us to carry on. Meena will go the distance and make us all proud, but she needs financial assistance for legal filing fees, and for much else. These funds will go directly into her bank account.

Oh–and what advice did I give Meena? I told her that she can thank me by freeing and supporting another woman.

First published in [4W](#).

[Support Meena – Afghan Feminist Refugee](#)

When Kabul fell to the Taliban in the summer of 2021, Meena knew her life was in danger.

As a young, single woman with a medical degree and an advocate for women’s health and education, Meena had broken the conservative rules of her community. So she made a daring and desperate plea to US feminists, [writing](#) that “The Taliban and my own family will come for me... Can you kindly save my life? I don’t have a way of getting out.”

The process of helping Meena and other feminists escape from Afghanistan required many months of around-the-clock work from an [amazing global team of feminist activists](#), coordinated primarily by radical feminist author Phyllis Chesler and international human rights activist Mandy Sanghera. Still, the

escape was narrow. Meena was on a Spanish military plane above the Kabul airport on August 26, 2021, when a suicide bombing killed over 180 people. She and her family barely made it out.

Meena is tremendously grateful to all of the individuals who helped save her life, and she's determined to continue her education in the hope of helping other women like her. She earned a scholarship to a top university in America, where she is currently studying for her MSW. However, her troubles aren't over.

When Meena bravely came to America, she did so alone, without any family or financial support. Now, she really needs donations to help with her legal, educational, and survival expenses, including:

1. Legal filing fees & other expenses related to her application for political asylum in America (which is being handled pro bono)
2. Health insurance and medical care (est. \$2800/year)
3. School expenses not covered by her scholarship, including books, technology expenses, and other school fees (est. \$5,250/year)
4. Food, clothing, and travel to and from school

Please consider donating to help Meena remain in the US and continue her education, in defiance of the Taliban and family pressures to end her education and get married. Meena is committed to using the opportunities she has received to help others. She has already succeeded in also helping her mother, younger sister, and grandmother also escape Afghanistan and settle in Europe, and she plans to use her degree to help refugees like herself.

Donations of all and any amount are deeply appreciated.

<https://www.gofundme.com/f/support-meena-feminist-afghan-refugee>