

# Wahid Azizi's Speech at Rahela Trust's AGM & Annual Lecture 2023



## On Supporting Girls' Education in Afghanistan

Aslam Alikum, good evening,

Baroness Fiona Hodgson of Abinger, CBE, chair Samantha Rennie, ladies, and gentlemen.

It is good to see so many familiar faces. Thank you for the opportunity to be part of this discussion today.

Discussions like this are opportunities to discuss and come up with solutions for often complex socio-political issues. Today's discussion is no less important nor less difficult. We have gathered in this house to discuss the painful and frustrating subject of banning girls' education for the past 500 days. This is a topic that speaks to all of us. Neither Islam nor Afghan culture prescribes denying girls an education. Throughout history, Afghan women played an important role in the development of our country and will continue to do so.

"If girls don't get an education, how will the future generation prosper?"

These are the words of a young Afghan girl who shared her frustration about the school ban on her school.

Coming from an anti-corruption background, there is a lot to talk about what went wrong in Afghanistan leading up to the republic's collapse and the current situation. But we can agree on two things: access to education and a relatively vibrant media were the cornerstones of the past two decades in Afghanistan. Nonetheless, they are both undermined today. It is also important to clarify that this is not a platform to complain and whitewash our mistakes instead of owning the responsibility.

I am sharing my personal experience and opinion in a bit to try to help Afghan girls' education:

1. There is no substitute for official schooling. We must work together to advocate for lifting the ban on girls' education. I know it is easier said than done. But the courageous protests by the Afghans inside the country and abroad and seeing incidents such as the walk-out of male students from classrooms in support of their fellow female counterparts are encouraging signs.

2. Besides diplomatic pressure and funding for education from the international community, the real push to reopen schools for girls should come from the Afghans themselves. There have been scattered examples of successful advocacy for opening schools in Herat and Balkh, for example. As the new school season is on the horizon, this can be an excellent opportunity to make the case.



3. Increase in funding and scholarships to Afghan girls. This could be a great way to help those who have already finished or those concluding the 12th grade but now cannot because of the ban.
4. These scholarships should drop some criteria or innovate ways to facilitate them, such as dropping the English proficiency test required by most schools for bachelor's or master's degrees. Or arrange alternative ways, such as an extra semester of the language requirement.
5. Providing funding and support for short-term high-impact courses such as in the IT sector. There is a lot of demand for IT skills in the labour markets worldwide.
6. Training and education for other jobs that can be performed from the comfort of the home office.
7. For an impactful and value for money, more transparency measures should be in place to help avoid the waste of resources and money.
8. The Grassroot initiative for promoting girls' education is promising but insufficient. Ex. [Matiullah Wesa is doing a great job](#) and so is [Pashtana Durani's network of schools](#).
9. Supporting other activists that offer alternative education can prove helpful as well. Malala Fund is currently supporting a number of activists.
10. Support local organisations actively working for girls' education in the country. But this, again, should not be hijacked by mismanagement and malpractice. We have witnessed that even well-intentioned NGOs are prone to corruption and loss of funding which undermines the impact and intent in the first place.



Wahidullah is a socio-political analyst based in Brussels. For over three years he's worked with leading anti-corruption organisations including Transparency International and Integrity Watch to promote government accountability in Afghanistan. He received the prestigious DAAD scholarship to study at the University of Potsdam. Currently, he works for a civil society organisation focusing on issues related to Afghanistan, and migration.



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