

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نیاشد تن من مباد بدین بوم ویر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبان های اروپایی

<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2013/01/2013169754510752.html>

Displaced Afghans feel strangers at home

Those living in camps for displaced people complain of grinding poverty, crime, and unscrupulous leaders.

1/9/2013



Nafas Gol says leaders in the camp she lives in hoard supplies donated by aid groups [

After spending 10 years as a refugee in Pakistan, Nafas Gol never thought she would be living in

a tent in a camp for the internally displaced in Kabul.

"[Afghan President Hamid] Karzai was everywhere saying 'come, your country is ready', so I did," she said.

More than five million refugees have returned to the country since the US-led invasion in 2001. Nafas Gol is one of about 30,000 returnees who are living in camps for internally displaced people in the Afghan capital.

As the winter sets in, the dirt roads in the camp Nafas Gol lives in, in Kabul's Deh-e-Sabz neighbourhood, have turned to mud and ice. The tents and tarps that line the now-slippery paths provide little shelter from the elements.

"This tarpaulin is three years old. What can it do for us?" asked another camp resident, Atiqullah, who returned to Kabul eight months ago.

"Everyone is dying of hunger. There is no flour, no oil, no wood," he said, fearing a repeat of the harsh winter of 2012, which led to the deaths of more than 100 Afghans.

But the bitter winter climate isn't the only problem facing those living in the camps.

'People look at us like dogs'

Leaving behind the uncertain life of a refugee, many internally displaced Afghans thought their days of being taken advantage of by opportunists were behind them. But life in the camps can be just as predatory as in neighbouring Iran and Pakistan.

Area residents often stalk the camps at night, says Shir Ali, a 26-year-old camp resident. He described some of these people as vandals and *podaris*, or heroin addicts.

"People come with guns to steal from the poor. They strong-arm people," said Mohammad Aslan, a *malek*, or leader, of the camp.

In such living circumstances, everyone - men, women and children - have to contribute. Many women and children beg or sell simple items on the streets. This breaking of cultural norms has led some to believe they can approach the community's women, said Shir Ali. "They think they can come here and take advantage of us ... They think this area is a brothel, that our women are prostitutes."

"People look at us like dogs here," Atiqullah noted.

Nor does the available work, such as driving carriages or going from house-to-house collecting old clothes to repair and sell, alleviate their poverty. Shir Ali said people need at least 500 afghanis (\$10) per day to survive, but that those in the camps often make between 100-150 afghanis (\$2-3). Meanwhile, he said, "one kilo of flour is 170 afghanis (\$3.30); the oil to cook it

with is another 100 afghanis (\$2)".

The high cost of living has forced camp residents to find alternative means of survival. These can often prove dangerous. Children sometimes climb trees to shake down branches, Shir Ali said, while another waits at the base with a basket to catch the falling wood - a valuable commodity during the freezing-cold winter. But children have been injured when they slip and fall.

Unscrupulous *maleks*

In conversations with Al Jazeera, many residents quietly stated that fellow camp members often contribute to their woes.

Nafas Gol said the camp *maleks*, or leaders, many of whom came from her own tribe, often hoarded money and firewood provided by aid groups.

"They take it. I've seen them. They collect the money and the supplies and they keep it for themselves. But I won't stay quiet any longer," she said, as she pointed at the *malek* and his compatriots, who were guiding journalists around the Deh-e-Sabz camp.

Researchers and journalists have also reported cases of opportunism within the camps. Nassim Majidi, director at Samuel Hall Consulting, a research and consulting company based in Kabul, said "*maleks* [camp leaders] are recurrently blamed for not handing out the assistance evenly, for keeping some for themselves, selling the rest ... Those who have power abuse it, and these sites are not an exception."

Fouzia Monawer, who researches migration, said that during a visit to a primarily Pashtun camp in a rural area outside of Kabul, a local *malek* guiding her and her team were "closely controlling who we did and did not speak to. On our way out, however, we came across a Tajik woman who explained that the *malek* had not only stolen her family's UNHCR-distributed tent but, each time an aid worker would come to distribute assistance to the IDPs, the *malek* would prevent her family - and other Tajik families - from receiving aid."

Monawer said that when the *malek* saw her speaking to this woman, he "quickly interrupted, making the woman so uncomfortable that she soon left with her two small children".

Back to Pakistan?

Deh-e-Sabz camp describe an equally bleak existence in Iran and Pakistan, some said there were more economic opportunities in those countries.

Atiqullah, who lived in the border city of Peshawar for over 25 years, said that unlike in Kabul, his family did not live in a tent in Pakistan.

"We rented," he said, a fact Atiqullah proudly credits to his 18,000 rupee-a-month salary as a supervisor at Wall's, a local ice cream producer.

For years, Atiqullah's salary also helped him avert authorities asking for proof of his refugee status. "I used to give them *reshwat* [bribes]," he said, at a cost of 500 to 1,000 rupees (\$5-10) each time. But when he lost his job last year, that quickly came to an end. "I couldn't keep bribing the police. They finally kicked us out."

When he did return to Afghanistan, Atiqullah thought he could return to his home, the volatile eastern province of Laghman. But he and his family were heart-broken when they returned, realising they had neither a home nor land to call their own. Like many repatriates, they soon found themselves in Kabul.

Life is harder here than in Pakistan: Atiqullah had trouble paying a doctor when his child became sick, something he said would not have happened in Peshawar. He is now considering a return to Pakistan.

Mohammed Aslan, a leader in the Deh-e-Sabz camp, cited Atiqullah's willingness to leave for Pakistan as evidence of how vulnerable repatriates are in Kabul. "If he had land here," Aslan explained, "of course he wouldn't return to Pakistan".

Pakistan has declared a June 2013 deadline for Afghan refugees to return to their homeland, but meanwhile Atiqullah is working to gather the 5,000 afghanis (\$100) needed to smuggle himself back. But given that he makes just 100 afghanis (\$2) a day, he would have to go into debt to do this.

Atiqullah is not alone in his thinking: a recent report by the Population Profiling, Verification and Response Survey on Afghan refugees in Pakistan found that 84 percent have no intention of leaving.

The report, produced in part by the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees, also found that 20 per cent of Afghans have invested a total of about 18bn rupees (\$180m) in businesses in Pakistan.

Meanwhile Roh Gol, who is referred to as the *khaleh*, or aunt, of the camp for her leadership role, blamed the government of Hamid Karzai for convincing some Afghans that it was safe to return.

"Karzai keeps talking, but what has come of his words?"