

Ladies and gentlemen,

Good day to each one of you. I stand before you today to introduce an organization that is driven by an unwavering commitment to a matter of paramount importance - the RMCA Foundation. Our mission is clear and compelling: to rescue the lives of mothers and newborns in Afghanistan who tragically fall victim to childbirth complications.

Allow me a moment to share my personal odyssey and the fervour that fuels this undertaking. I, an Afghan medical professional who has spent the last two decades in the Netherlands specializing in geriatrics, am honoured to address you. As a woman who has directly confronted the challenges of childbirth, I count myself fortunate to have accessed the medical expertise and resources afforded by the Netherlands.

In my inaugural birthing experience, I faced the spectre of severe bleeding, pushing me perilously close to the precipice of mortality. Timely medical interventions, including blood transfusions, were my salvation. The subsequent time, my child's unfavourable positioning ushered in a gruelling 24-hour labour, culminating in an imperative caesarean section. These interventions not only preserved my life but that of my offspring. In both instances, the spectre of death loomed palpably, casting its shadow over my progeny's future and the potential devastation my absence could have wrought upon our modest family.

Incontestably, the agony of a woman perishing while bringing life into the world is an unparalleled sorrow. Regrettably, the odds of survival during childbirth for countless women in my homeland of Afghanistan are alarmingly bleak. The shroud of mortality looms ominously over them.

Permit me to share the gravity of the circumstance through a few respected research sources:

According to the World Health Organization's report in February 2023, every two minutes, a woman's life is lost during pregnancy or childbirth, a harrowing statistic that resonates profoundly. Afghanistan, sadly, ranks among the nations with an elevated mortality rate, boasting the highest maternal and child mortality rates in Asia, owing to preventable childbirth complications.

A sobering prediction from the United Nations Development Programme's June 2023 report forecasts an additional 51,000 women falling prey to preventable complications during or immediately following childbirth within the next two years, should we remain inactive.

As corroborated by Inter SOS' report in May 2022, the healthcare resources in Afghanistan have been rendered elusive by the war on terror and political instability. Ineffectual funding to the health system places women and children in jeopardy, endangering the strides made over two decades.

UNICEF's report from June 2023 underscores the grim reality: Afghanistan remains perilous for infants, children, and mothers, with access to health facilities being an elusive luxury. Infant mortality rates are dishearteningly high, and preventable pregnancy-related fatalities remain distressingly common.

These sobering statistics underscore the urgency that drives the RMCA Foundation. We are resolute in our commitment to providing essential resources, medical care, and unwavering support to Afghan women grappling with childbirth complications. We aspire to offer them the lifeline that I was privileged to receive. Yet, this mission is not one we can undertake in isolation. We extend our gratitude to those who have supported Afghanistan and who have provided us the platform to bring the RMCA Foundation to your attention.

With your endorsement, we can labour to curtail maternal and neonatal mortality rates in Afghanistan. Together, let us ensure that no woman traverses the precipice of childbirth without adequate medical care and support.

Now, let's delve into our purpose:

The RMCA Foundation is unwaveringly dedicated to generating palpable change in the lives of Afghan mothers and newborns by executing a multifaceted strategy:

1. **Establishment of Local Health Centers:** Acknowledging the vital necessity of accessible healthcare, particularly in remote regions, we are establishing rudimentary local health centres. These centres will serve as sanctuaries for women grappling with childbirth complications, providing them with essential medical attention and significantly mitigating the perils of maternal and neonatal mortality.
2. **Health Education Programs:** Knowledge empowers. Through robust health education initiatives, we strive to arm local communities with maternal and neonatal health awareness. By imparting insights into potential complications, best practices, and preventive measures, we empower families and communities to make informed decisions for safer childbirth experiences.
3. **Training Programs:** Education is pivotal in the preservation of life. We are devoted to offering short and medium-term training programs, targeting potential candidates within the community who can be groomed as skilled childbirth attendants. These attendants will emerge as invaluable resources, offering vital care during childbirth. Additionally, our commitment extends to enriching the competencies of regional nurses and midwives to elevate the quality of maternal care.
4. **Online Knowledge Exchange:** A divide exists that our mission endeavours to bridge - the knowledge gap between continents. Through advanced online technology, we aspire to fuse European and Dutch medical expertise with healthcare providers in Afghanistan. A digital alliance encompassing online education, standardized protocols, and electronic patient records stands to revolutionize basic and maternal healthcare in Afghanistan.

Our objective is to forge an unassailable network that fortifies healthcare practices and, in turn, saves lives. Nevertheless, we humbly acknowledge that the realization of these ambitions hinges on collective endeavour and endorsement.

I earnestly implore you to unite with us in this momentous expedition. By aligning yourself with the RMCA Foundation, you endorse a cause that directly alters the trajectory of Afghan women and children. Your contribution will empower us to erect secure health centres, enlighten communities, impart training, and bridge knowledge disparities.

Together, we possess the potential to metamorphose the realm of maternal and neonatal healthcare in Afghanistan. In partnership with RMCA, let us become the architects of enduring transformation.

With profound appreciation,

Mahbooba Menapal RMCA Foundation