



NADIA BAKHSHI AWARD

Who will grieve for this woman?
Does she not seem too insignificant for our concern?
Yet in my heart I never will deny her,
Who suffered death because she chose to turn.

Anna Akhmatova

The Nadia Bakhshi Award* is established by Melissa Network with the support of Refu-Aid and the European Network of Migrant Women and will be given to refugee women in order to support their education and their contribution to social change.

Nadia Bakhshi, one of many losses along the refugee trail, died in Serbia last December. She was leading the way for her daughter and two grandchildren away from oppression, to a world where she hoped that human rights would be respected. She had lived her life in Kabul, where, as a mullah's wife she had seen her daughters give up their dreams. One of them was trapped in an intolerable life of forced early marriage and unimaginable violence, while the other one killed herself in order to avoid the same fate. Then Nadia "chose to turn": at the age of 54 she decided to change things giving up the life she had for a life she could only hope for.

This hope is what sustained her and her family for the months they remained in Greece. During their time at the camp of Elaionas, they joined Melissa Network and participated eagerly in the life of the community. In the evenings, they opened their door to other women and sat by the steps to eat together and share stories of suffering and resilience. They gave one another advice and consolation, a caring glance, a warm gesture. All along, they kept planning the rest of their journey to the north, in order to join their extended family in Ireland. Smugglers were the only ones who promised what legislation did not allow: moving on. They left right before Christmas and managed to get as far as Serbia, until the car they took with 14 passengers crashed in an attempt to avoid the police. Nadia was among those who died.

Nadia is survived by her 26-year-old daughter Fatima, who remains stranded in Serbia with both legs amputated, and her two grandchildren, Hamed-Sohaib, 9 and Ahmad, 5. They are waiting to reunite with their extended family in Dublin. In the meantime, the boys draw pictures of their family and write the story of their journey. In those drawings, the two women stand beside them, holding their hands. They dream of their grandmother, talk about her in present tense and pray that God returns their mother's legs.

Nadia Bakhshi broke a cycle of violence and became an agent of change for her family as well as for all those who were leaning on and learning from her. Her decisions and her actions gave comfort, strength and inspiration to many women going through this journey, those running away from blazing wars as well as silent wars confined within household borders. This award is dedicated to her memory and the seeds of hope she planted in the hearts of others. So that she does not remain a nameless victim.

* Grants will vary according to need and availability of funds. Details about the application process and the selection criteria will be announced shortly on our website.