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The demand for a normal life

Interview with Adalat Khan conducted by Niki Kubaczek

Adalat Khan

At the SOS Mitmensch Matinee at the beginning of this year, you donated the Ute-Bock-Award of 3000 € to the Caritas in order to show that you are not fighting for money but for equal rights. You said that it would not be a problem for you to earn enough money if you had the same rights as people with an Austrian passport.

Adalat Khan: You know, some people want to make propaganda and claim that those people (the refugees) do not want a solution, but only want to collect money. This is why we became critical with regard to donations. But, at the same time, we need money for the lawyers, or for food. So, we need to explain to people that money is not the main issue, that we want a solution. We do not demand donations or facilities as the religious people seem to think who say: We provide you with warm places, your own places. We, however are talking about human rights!

For weeks, the doors of the Votiv church have been closed except during mass. Not more than five supporters or visitors have been allowed to enter at the same time…

It is important to be in contact with normal people. It is equally important for us to be able to talk with the supporters, to explain our positions, to make plans but the archdiocese and the Caritas want to cut off our contacts to the supporters, to media and to society. When media want to come inside who are on the side of the government, they are allowed to enter. But when independent media want to come, they are hindered to do so. Recently, a person from Germany came who wanted to write an article, he had to wait for two hours at the gate.

Do you think there is a difference between helping and supporting?

Yes! We are glad when people donate and want to help the refugees but we do not claim for facilities, we want a solution! We need to move, to put pressure on people, to contact people. This is partly also the responsibility of the supporters as they understand the system here, the law, the positions ... But this is not a democratic country, in a democratic country, if people talk about a problem, they are heard but here, no one listens and no one answers.

When I talked to the Caritas about our claim to stop deportations, they only said: "Oh Khan, do not talk about that!" How is it possible to find a solution if nobody takes responsibility? How can we get a solution if we cannot address the responsible people? When we cannot tell them: “We want a solution!” Our position is very clear: We do not talk about facilities, about own places, but about legal status and about our struggle. This is the time to share responsibilities. You do your job, outside, on your side, and I do my job, inside. You provide a table, I talk to the prime minister, to the chancellor. This is the European Union. They say they work for a peaceful world, we support this! Because we are also part of this world, and our role is very important.

You have often talked about the demand for a normal life. Is this for you the same as the demand for equality?

No, about equality you read in books and articles. But a person from Austria should go to my region. I give this person 500 €, food and accommodation, and then, this person should live there. You cannot live a normal life there, it is a prison. I want a normal life and I want to enjoy life openly.

Another Refugee from the camp once said, that a person who grew up in Austria should first go the way he has come, before starting to explain the world to him…

Listen, in my region, we also have a lot or refugees, and we provided them with a platform. My father and my family helped them with regard to money, housing, jobs, etc. ... And we do not have he same economic situation as in Europe. But we helped those who needed a hand, for example with regard to legal affairs. 1,5 mio Afghani and Pushdun people received a passport from Pakistan so that they can travel in the world. Can you believe this?

When people talk about the Refugee Camp, they frequently talk about "refugees" and "supporters". So, would you define yourself as a supporter as well?

Absolutely! I want to give younger people the possibility to learn to read, to go to university in order to fight this stupid system, to make experiences, to have a normal life.

My problems are not only here: 20% of my problems are in Austria, but 80% are related to Pakistan. Every day, I check how my family in the Swat Valley is. I constantly wonder how we, how I can protect my family because they are in great danger. It has been eight years now since I left Pakistan. Usually, people there do not

talk openly in the media as religious groups and security agencies have a lot of influence. I am afraid that they will again kill somebody from my family as I give my opinion very clearly. I want protection now!

When you open your mouth, they shoot you or you first receive a letter from the security agencies and the religious groups – and, then you are on the black list. I am also on the black list.

On the Black List?

Yes, and my cousin as well. The Muslims asked me: "Why do you talk about education for women? Why do you talk openly about this? Why are you not a good Muslim?"

Last year, they shot another cousin, they also wanted to kill my son but he ran away to Islamabad. They have no idea, these politicians...

But we love life. Because it is one time only. Enjoy it! Religious groups do not want us to say that the world belongs to us. But this world is for us!