



HOUSE OF COMMONS

# Culture, Media and Sport Committee

## Oral evidence: Creative artists in Afghanistan, HC329

Wednesday 27 November 2024

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Members present: Dame Caroline Dinenage (Chair); Mr Bayo Alaba; Mr James Frith; Dr Rupa Huq; Liz Jarvis; Jo Platt; Paul Waugh.

Questions 1-32

### Witnesses

I: Mohsen Makhmalbaf, film director, writer and producer; Hana Makhmalbaf, filmmaker and poet; Maysam Makhmalbaf, film producer, director of photography and actor; and Jimmy Mulville, comedy writer, producer and co-founder of Hat Trick Productions.



## Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Mohsen Makhmalbaf, Hana Makhmalbaf, Maysam Makhmalbaf and Jimmy Mulville.

Q1 **Chair:** Welcome to this meeting of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee. This morning, we are going to hear about the plight of creative artists who have remained in Afghanistan following the return of the Taliban Government, and all about the efforts to try to resettle some of them in the UK. Today, we are joined by Mohsen Makhmalbaf, who is a filmmaker and producer, by Jimmy Mulville, TV producer and co-founder of Hat Trick Productions, by Maysam Makhmalbaf, who is an actor and producer, and by Hana Makhmalbaf, who is a filmmaker, poet and director of “The List”, an incredibly powerful film that documents the family’s efforts to resettle at-risk Afghan creatives and journalists.

To give a bit of background, in 2021, Mohsen drew up a list of 800 people and their families who might face oppression and reprisals for their work between 2001 and 2021. The film shows the Makhmalbafs liaising with Government authorities to try to rescue those people during the evacuation of Kabul. The film is intercut with concurrent video footage taken by people in Afghanistan during the airlift. Jimmy Mulville has been very supportive in helping the family with their campaign and raising awareness of the plight of remaining artists. I thought that that would be a little helpful background for anybody watching our discussions today.

First of all, thank you all for joining us today. We are all really grateful that you have taken the time to come and speak to us. Before we begin, do any Members have any interests that they wish to declare? No? Thank you.

I will start with the questions. This is quite a broad question, Mohsen, but I want to start with you. What is the situation regarding the safety of creative artists in Afghanistan—for filmmakers, for visual artists, for writers? Are they being specifically targeted or are we talking about a danger that anyone who is in any way outspoken is facing?

**Mohsen Makhmalbaf:** Thank you for this opportunity to talk about Afghan artists at high risk. As you mentioned, we had a list of 800 artists and their families. Two months before the Taliban took power, we gathered that list, which was about filmmakers who made films against the Taliban, writers who wrote books about fundamentalism, and dancers, singers and musicians, because, as you know, all of those arts are forbidden in the eyes of the Taliban.

We tried to evacuate them before the Taliban came back to power. We wrote letters to 300 film festivals, asking them to each save the life of one of those people. The answer was negative. Then we knocked on the doors of different Governments. Fortunately, the French Government helped us by evacuating 279 of them in the last week of August 2021, by military aeroplane, but we could not evacuate all of them because of the crowd around Kabul airport.



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They were targeted because they are famous. For example, actresses' images were on the walls in Kabul city. Many of them were visible in TV programmes—TV presenters, actors, actresses. Artists, generally, are famous. The Taliban are against all art—musicians, dancers, singers—and women were working in art. That is why all of them were at high risk. We could not evacuate all of them in those days.

Of the remaining part, until now, we have evacuated 301 people, and their families, involved in art activity to France. They are those who have connections to France—for example, they have close family or a close friend there. Then with the help of Germany, we evacuated 80 of them who have connections with family or a close friend there. Some 17 of them were evacuated to the USA with the help of three universities—Harvard University, Chicago University and Columbia University—they were professors in art universities in Afghanistan and were invited, or we asked through our campaign and they accepted them. Until now, we have evacuated 398 of them, but the remaining part are those who have connections with the UK. For example, 40% of them have connections with families here, like a brother, sister, uncle, brother-in-law, sister-in-law or distant family, and 60% of them have a close friend or close colleague here.

The people who remain in Afghanistan tried to escape to a neighbouring country like Iran and Pakistan, but shortly, Iran pushed them back. For example, last year, 1.6 million Afghan refugees were pushed back from Iran, and a few of them were from our list. Until now, during the past three years, unfortunately, seven of those on our list have been killed—for example, a comedian, who was trying through TV channels to make people happy. When the Taliban arrived in 2021, they immediately found him and asked him in the street, "Okay, you are making people happy. Can you tell us a joke?" When he started to tell a joke, they killed him immediately.

The other people hide themselves inside Afghanistan and change their places. For example, in 2024, another comedian was found by the Taliban in a Kabul street. Again, they asked him, "Can you tell us another joke?" and then killed him. They cannot hide themselves forever. There is another example: we had an actress who was hiding herself. Finally, after an investigation, the Taliban arrived at her flat. She knew that she would be arrested and that in prison she would get tortured and perhaps they would rape her, so she jumped out of the fourth floor to the street and committed suicide. I can show you the image of this lady.

There was another artist who was active on YouTube. The Taliban found her, arrested her, tortured her and killed her in prison just because she was giving information about what is happening inside Afghanistan. She was on our list. We have more of them. For example, last Friday—five days ago—the Taliban killed 11 Sufis who were using musical instruments. They killed them just because—why?—they used musical instruments; they are against all kinds of art. These people are really targeted and they cannot always hide themselves.



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Another example is the Minister of Culture. He called me, after one year of the return of the Taliban, and told me, “Mohsen, I heard you are helping Afghan artists to evacuate outside of Afghanistan. I am hiding myself”—he was the Minister of Culture—“in the mountains. My family are at risk. Please help my family.” Later on, the Taliban found the family, put them under pressure and tortured them, and the Minister accepted being in prison. This is the situation.

If we cannot help them to be here, they are really in danger. Why? First, they are important. They are educated people, and they were brave to talk about the situation. For two decades, they criticised the Taliban, so they are the enemy of the Taliban, because the Taliban are against any cultural movement and they are the fruit of two decades of democracy in Afghanistan. Bringing these people here is not just saving the lives of individuals; it is saving culture.

**Q2 Chair:** You have spoken about a number of people who have gone to France, Germany and the US. Can you remind me how many are still in danger, in your view?

**Mohsen Makhmalbaf:** Less than 300. On our list—we have all the documents about them—there are 283 people with their families. There are 90 artists, and with their families they are 283 people. Some of them are single people; some of them are married. Sometimes, for example, the husband is a filmmaker and the wife is an actress, or the husband is a journalist and the wife is a writer. So they are not just family, but they are collaborating, like our family—all the members of our family make films—because it is the normal attitude in our area that the whole family connects to one sort of job.

**Q3 Chair:** Thank you. Jimmy, can you describe how you see the UK’s responsibility to these artists?

**Jimmy Mulville:** The impact of the film that you have mentioned, “The List”, which was made by Hana in their apartment in London in August 2021—remember the images from Kabul airport of people clinging to the outside of aircraft? When I saw “The List” I thought, “Well, given what I do for a living—making a programme like ‘Have I Got News for You’—if I was born in Kabul, I would be on the list.” It had a real impact on me, and I felt I wanted to help.

I did not know what I was doing, so I got some professional help and they put me in touch with MPs. I remember meeting you and lots of your colleagues, who were really sympathetic, during the earlier part of this year, and we felt very heartened by that. But of course then you are confronted with the bureaucracy of government and the proper channels that you need to go through, which I think would be dangerous for these people, because, as Mohsen said, there is an urgency to this.

Mohsen told me a story about an actress who was walking in the street in a full burqa. She was worried about being on the street anyway, because women are no longer allowed to be out in the street on their own, but there was an old poster of her film, and two Taliban were shooting at the



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poster. So there is an urgency to this, and I feel that the Government, or some Government agency, should take a look at it and see it as a special case along the lines of the Ukrainian evacuation. This is not about immigration or asylum. I know the mood music around that is problematic. This is about a humanitarian evacuation.

The previous Government extended a special visa to a group of young women medical students who are now relocated in Scotland. They are bringing added value to that area, because they are going to become professional doctors. Similarly, these people do not need us to find them jobs or accommodation; they need to not be killed. They can come here and work and create content. Through Afghanistan International TV, BBC Persian and other outlets, which need content providers, they can beam this material back into Afghanistan and the young people of Afghanistan can then see their culture. Albeit it will be 4,000 miles away, nevertheless it will be free speech, and obviously they cannot enjoy that at the moment. My view is that if there is any way that we can get the Government to look at this as a special case, then the sooner the better.

**Q4 Jo Platt:** Hi, I am Jo Platt. Thank you all for coming in this morning. I want to concentrate on the time of the evacuation and the rapid advancement of the Taliban, and my question is to Mohsen. How did the nature of the UK and US withdrawal impact the people you spoke to at that time?

**Mohsen Makhmalbaf:** At the beginning we had a list of 800. We knocked on the door of different Governments. Macron's office accepted, offering to help us as much as possible. They had army aeroplanes. We gave the password to different artists and we guided them from different cities to come to Kabul around April, but around Kabul there were a lot of people—1 million people were surrounding Kabul airport. It was so difficult for those artists to arrive there but, by pushing each other, finally 279 of them were evacuated by army aeroplane, very fast.

The other part took time, especially for the German part. They had a good way to help them. For example, they have no embassy inside Afghanistan, so we asked artists to take the risk of arriving in Pakistan and introducing themselves to the embassy of Germany. Then the embassy of Germany hired a guesthouse for two months. Our artists were in the guesthouse; they did not go to the street, because immediately the Pakistan police would know them and push them back. That is why they were in the guesthouse for less than two months; they did the paperwork and then they flew, with the help of Germany, to Germany.

For the USA it was the same. They came to Pakistan, they got a visa to Europe and from Europe they flew to the USA. For the other part, to fly to France, they had collection in Iran as well, because they had an embassy in Iran. Some of them went through Iran, getting a visa from Iran and going to France. But here, the best way is that we do not need you to evacuate them from Afghanistan; we just need quick visas when they arrive in Pakistan and introduce themselves to the UK embassy. You can help them to come here by giving visas and aeroplane tickets, because



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every day they are sort of dying for them. Coming to Pakistan is not easy for them, but they risk it, because it is their future and it is also their daily life. We do not know if tomorrow, maybe one of them will disappear again. For them, it is a matter of their life, and also it is a matter of saving the culture of Afghanistan.

As you know, Afghanistan in the past, before the rise of the Taliban, had a big history of culture, because Afghanistan was on the silk road. The silk road connected the west to the east, and Afghanistan was the meeting point of many big and rich cultures, such as India, Iran and Greece, all connected to each other through Afghanistan. For example, Buddhism arrived from India to Afghanistan, and then from India it gets back to China and central Asia. In Afghanistan, before the rise of the Taliban, different religions—Christianity, Islam, Buddhism—had co-existence together. It was the meeting point of many arts; for example, music from India, Turkey and Iran had a good meeting point in Kabul, and all arts were inspired by each other. Afghanistan had great culture.

Afghanistan was a secular country before the Soviet invasion, but after the rise of the Taliban everything changed. Before the rise of the Taliban, Afghanistan was moving forward to democracy, moving forward to modern life. Women could go to university, wearing their modern dress. A lot of women could then work in Government jobs, but after the Taliban took back power, more than 1 million women lost their jobs. More than 1 million women lost their opportunity to go to university and higher school. As you hear in the news, girls over 12 years old cannot go to school any more. Even recently, the Taliban announced that women could not talk loudly in the street. They beat them if the women talk with each other loudly in the street. Women cannot travel without their husbands. The situation of women is horrible.

In the two past decades that the west was there, they had 97 TV stations. They had more than 300 national and local radio stations and more than 100 newspapers. The Taliban shut down 90% of them, and the other 10% that are working are under the pressure of censorship. The majority of journalists hide themselves, and many of them are being killed.

That is the situation of Afghanistan. We need urgent help. For what? Not just for saving people. That is one of the main reasons, but the other reason is for our benefit here, because when artists come here they are the essence of the culture of Afghanistan. We are saving a culture, because the Taliban is reducing the culture—deleting the culture.

**Q5 Jo Platt:** To go back to the evacuation, had artists started to leave Afghanistan before the Doha agreement was signed? We want to try to get a timeline.

**Maysam Makhmalbaf:** The main problem that we faced when we were trying to get them out was the urgency that the UK, US and other forces came out of Afghanistan. There was not enough time to prepare for these people to leave while it was safe. I remember in the last week, they were telling us that we had one more week, and then they were cutting it back



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one day and then another. They were under the control of the Taliban. The Taliban was dictating to them: "No, we won't let you stay one more day. You have to leave sooner."

I remember every single day we were thinking, "How can we get our people to the door of the airport to go through?" It was like drops of water; every time they opened the door to go, they allowed two people to go inside. Because it was chaos all around there, and because they had not prepared for it, the Taliban could attack the airport as well. On one day, we were calling people to come to the airport; the next day we were worried and saying to them, "Go back. The Taliban has found out and they are going to explode a bomb in the airport." If they knew that our artists were around there, they would come and just throw them all out.

The main problem was that if we had had enough time beforehand, the artists could have prepared and people could have prepared and come out in safety. Even before it was announced on the radio or TV that the Taliban was coming back—two months before that—the artists inside Afghanistan called my father and said, "We are sensing that these people are going to leave and the Taliban is coming back. Please help us out." My father started to call different people. The evacuation happened in less than five weeks, and that is the problem we had.

**Mohsen Makhmalbaf:** May I give you an example? I had prostate surgery and was in hospital. I was on the phone knocking on the doors of different Governments. The doctor took my phone and put me to sleep, and when I woke up I started again, because we were in a hurry. Each moment, we could lose something. It happened like a rush back, coming back, and it was completely stressful. I remember when they said, "This is the last day. You can send us 20 names." We did not know which one of those people could get out. I remember there was a lady who was giving birth near Kabul, and her husband was on the Taliban's list—to kill him. The wife was telling the husband, "You go out, you go out!" And the husband was saying, "How can I go out without you?" The wife was answering, "You go out because they told us just 20 persons alone, not with their family." It was very harsh. But we started this campaign from our flat in Battersea in London, and we think we should finish it here.

**Jimmy Mulville:** If you see the film—Hana can speak about this, because she went with her son to visit her family and ended up staying for five weeks—it encapsulates this incredible pressure that the family were under. It is a very powerful, moving film. It is an extraordinary home movie that Hana made; maybe she can speak about that.

**Chair:** We will come to Hana in a minute. I am going to ask you all to keep your answers a little bit shorter and stay on topic, because we have a lot of questions and everybody will have their own themes that they want to pursue.

Q6 **Jo Platt:** I have a follow-up question about the UK Government's response. They said that "open acknowledgment" of the preparation for "evacuations would have sent a message that UK were wavering." How



would you respond to that?

**Jimmy Mulville:** I think we are all agreed that to go over what has happened has limited value for us, because we are thinking about what is happening now. There is lots to be said about how we left; it wasn't the greatest moment in our history, but having said that, I think we want to remain positive. Britain has always had a great reputation for offering refuge to people in desperate need, and I think this is a case in point.

Q7 **Jo Platt:** Mohsen, can I follow up on something you said earlier about the importance of the rich culture of Afghanistan? As creators who have worked in Afghanistan, you have told us about some of that rich cultural heritage. How had that cultural offer from artists in Afghanistan changed since 2001?

**Mohsen Makhmalbaf:** All cinemas were shut down. All theatres and places for music and concerts were closed. The cinema, theatre and music were completely forbidden. Dancing—*[Interruption.]* Oh, since then? It was perfect because, as I said, they had 97 TV channels—more than here. It was a moment that many young people, including women, could go to school and to university. For example, I was there teaching cinema to young people, and they had a great cinema movement for the young generation. There were a lot of painters, a lot of choreographers, a lot of dancers and a lot of musicians.

That 20 years was a peak of freedom of speech. It was a peak of practising democracy. It was very good, but at the same time full of violence, because the west lost more than 3,000 soldiers and the Afghan people lost more than 160,000 from Taliban attacks. But at the same time freedom of speech was much, much better than anywhere in the Middle East. That is why we say that saving these artists is not just saving individuals; it is saving the fruit of those two decades. It is saving the heritage of the Afghan culture.

Also, when they come here they are the voice of the voiceless people of Afghanistan nowadays. They could let us know what is happening on the ground in Afghanistan. They could also teach the value of democracy and freedom to the Afghan people. Imagine: nowadays Afghan children are under the teaching of the Taliban, and in the next generation we will have a lot of terrorist ideas resulting from the religious extremist education that the Taliban give them.

If you want to have open-minded people in Afghanistan, you need colleagues here, because we are not the specialists for Afghanistan. But when the artists of Afghanistan come here they can teach their nation through social media and TV channels, and when they come here they help you. If you attack somewhere like Afghanistan with an army, attack always brings resistance. But when you talk through the culture, people get an open mind, and it is very helpful and it is full of benefit for this country. Because this is not the end of the work. The Taliban reproduce terrorism. Again, as the west, thinking about how to face them, you need





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open-minded people there. That is true of these cultural activists, if they are here.

We have the example of three TV channels. BBC Persia, for example, is teaching them, giving them news every day. Afghanistan International is a new TV channel headquartered in London. All Afghan culturalists and artists are working with them 24 hours a day, seven days a week, giving news to Afghanistan. Another TV channel is Amu. All of them are created by the artists who have come out of Afghanistan. We need more channels. We need more voices.

**Chair:** I will ask you to be a little bit shorter with your questions, because we have quite a lot to get through.

**Q8 Mr Frith:** I want to talk about how the evacuation was depicted in the film. The opening scenes in particular are extraordinary: seeing that first-hand footage of a news story that we all watched unfold was profound, and as a film lover I was torn between appreciating the filmmaking of it, and how bleak it was in depicting people's desperation and sense of abandonment. I was very moved—thank you. My question is to Maysam, about the evacuation and the events leading up to it. From your perspective, how did the events of the summer of 2021 unfold?

**Maysam Makhmalbaf:** As we were saying, what happened was basically that my father noticed something was going to happen in Afghanistan, and he called my sister Hana to come and help him to rescue these artists. My sister went to my father's flat to do that. Maybe it is better if Hana tells this story, because she was present there and she can tell it from the beginning. I can add to it if she misses anything.

As far as I could see, it was very chaotic, very fast, and we could not prepare for anything. I think the UK and the US and other forces did not prepare for anything, and everyone was under pressure. It reached a point where they thought, "We will come out," but they did not think what the consequences of that would be. That is what I can say, but as for how it unfolded, maybe Hana could come in.

**Chair:** We will come to that in a moment. Don't worry, Hana, we have not forgotten you.

**Q9 Mr Frith:** We will come to Hana, I promise. Earlier you referred to a phone call, or phone calls, being made with a sense that the Taliban were coming back. For how long was that in the air as an expectation or an anticipation before it happened?

**Maysam Makhmalbaf:** For nearly two months. I think it was at the end of June or early July that my father noticed that it was going to happen, and he started to call different film festivals, because we knew that they could help us to get them to a film festival. But the festivals said, "We don't have any festivals at the moment," or, "We don't have any embassy in Afghanistan; we cannot do this. You need to contact the Government to do this." That is what happened: we went to the Government to ask for help.



**Mohsen Makhmalbaf:** Here, I asked Hugh Hudson to help us with the UK Government. He could not, but his wife helped to connect us to the French Government. We have three connections to the French Government, and one of them was from Hugh Hudson.

Q10 **Mr Frith:** So everyone was scrabbling around, trying to find a connection to make the evacuation possible for them, and that just grew and grew in the expectation of the Taliban's return and people's sense of desperation.

**Maysam Makhmalbaf:** As soon as it was announced on the TV that it was going to happen, it became really chaotic, and people started to believe that this was really happening. It was at that point that everyone ran to the airport. Before that, the artists had a sense that it might happen, but they were not completely sure. They could not believe that, after 20 years, the west would suddenly leave them in less than a month and give the country back. Even then, they did not believe that the Taliban could gain control in such a quick time, because when they came, suddenly they took all of the country and they reached Kabul, and we were hearing that they were in Kabul and they had taken half of Kabul already by the middle hours. We were just shocked.

Q11 **Mr Alaba:** Thank you very much for your thoughts this morning and for conveying your journey. My question is to Hana: what motivated you to capture those moments?

**Hana Makhmalbaf:** Good morning, everyone, and thanks for having us here to be the voice of those voiceless artists back in Afghanistan whose life is in danger every day.

On your question, I actually did not intend to make a movie. I remember back in those days I was in Battersea playground with my three-year-old son, as he was then, and I got a phone call from my dad. He asked me if I could go for a few hours to help him, because he was under pressure. So I went with my son to my dad's house and saw the flat covered with all the lists of the people—the artists—that he wished to save. He was making phone calls, connecting to different people and different groups. I gave my son to my mum and I started to work. He gave me the phone numbers of the artists—to contact them, to guide them to the airport, to find them in different parts of Kabul and Afghanistan. But it was so much work that it was not enough for me alone to help, so I called Maysam and asked him, "Could you come for a few hours to help us?" He came, and those few hours turned into five consecutive weeks of working. What you see in the movie is just the last week.

I remember those five weeks were so much—sorry; every time I think about back then, my whole body shakes. I remember that it did not even feel good to sleep, because for each hour we slept, one more person would die, so we would feel guilty sleeping. We would take turns to sleep for, like, two hours. I would sleep, then just manage to continue, and then Mohsen would go to sleep. One of us was always alert in case anything happened.



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So this started happening: we started texting and contacting everyone. I can still remember the voice of some people. When I was on the phone, I could not film these parts because I was on the phone, but you see some parts in the movie. I still remember the voice of that actress who was on the phone with me, hiding herself under the burqa and trying to go to the airport while I was guiding her on how to get there. She was saying, "They are shooting at my photo on the billboard. They are shooting at me." I was just imagining what would happen if they arrested her.

I knew that these moments were shocking me, and as a filmmaker I have this habit: when something shocks me, I just turn on my camera. Back then it was my phone, and sometimes I was texting, so I would naturally, instinctively turn on my phone and record what was happening. I still remember a person who is also in the movie—the filmmaker who was trying to run away, and his wife suddenly started to give birth, next to the airport. The man did not know what to do to save his life. Were they going to arrest him if they went to their home? Or should he stay and help his wife?

I also remember that day I was on the phone trying to help that woman who was a dancer, whose child was with her as well. She was asking me what to do because she was next to the airport for three days and her two or three-year-old son was sick. She was asking me what to do—she was thirsty—and suddenly I heard a noise. It was a bomb explosion. After that, the only thing I could hear was the screams of people begging us to help them. This was the reason why I knew it was not enough just to help them—I had to record it.

I recorded some of the moments that I could. Those five weeks passed and the world moved on to other stories, but my dad, Mohsen, kept knocking on every possible door to bring out the remaining artists.

I remember one day we were walking together in the park, and he said, "You know what the problem is, Hana? The world has forgotten the artists, but those people have not forgotten that they are in danger." They were living in hiding, but they could not hide themselves. They were on TV. They were dancing. There were the famous people of Afghanistan.

When the Taliban came back, of course they were dangerous for everyone, but they would not go first to a baker and kill them. They would first go to those renowned people who were against them in cinema or poetry. As you saw in the movie, "The List", they shot the poet in the eye. They tortured them.

At that moment, I remembered that I had some footage. It was about one or two years after. I went to my archive and we started to gather everything to make a movie, or just something to remind the people in charge to help us even to evacuate one more—to save one more life. For me, the duty of the film was done—just one more life was the reason of the movie.

Q12 **Mr Alaba:** Thank you, Hana. My question was going to be, what did you



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think you were capturing when you switched on the camera? Were you documenting—were you inspiring? Were you trying to tell a story?

**Hana Makhmalbaf:** First of all, the events I saw touched me emotionally, so that was my trigger. But when the film was done, for me it turned out to be something more than that—it is like a historical document for me now. It is something to remind us what happened during those days. Those days were like the apocalypse, as you saw. As the Taliban were coming, everyone was trying to evacuate the city. As people outside, we might have forgotten who the Taliban were, but they remembered. They felt it in their body and soul. They lived those days. They knew what would happen.

As you saw, the whole city was running away from the Taliban possibly coming back, with nothing—they had their children and they had to run away. Imagine that pressure on a society. You saw the people. It was not that they did not know what would happen to them if they hung off the aeroplane. They were the educated people of Afghanistan. One of them was a dentist. One of them was a very famous footballer who was hanging off the aeroplane to save his life. If the pressure made the brain of an educated person do that, imagine what it would make other people do. That was the thing I wanted to show the world as well.

Q13 **Mr Alaba:** Thank you. My next question is to Jimmy. The film was made in 2021 and it was premiered. What was the focus of the campaign in terms of the launch and the profiling of the film?

**Jimmy Mulville:** It was not that organised, really. For me, I didn't know what to do, so I thought about what I could do. I could arrange a screening, which we did in central London and invited as many people as we possibly could. I then sought professional help. I got Powerscourt involved, which then managed to arrange very helpful, exploratory meetings in Portcullis House. We were regular visitors to Portcullis House from the beginning of the year; I felt like I was an MP at one point. I met lots of people who were very helpful. We felt that there was an election coming. We actually had a Select Committee hearing organised for just before the election, which was then postponed to today.

The focus of our campaign is to try to raise enough awareness about the situation and to impress upon the Government that it is an easy win. It is a no-brainer, really. It is a negligible number of people, and they are not people who will create enormous amounts of dependence on the state. They will add more value than they will take.

I add that I work with a charity called Combat Stress, which helps veterans re-enter civilian life. It has encountered a new phenomenon called moral injury. It affects specifically the young marines—men and women—who were sent out to Afghanistan to try to co-ordinate the evacuation. So damaged are they by this experience that they are now experiencing severe PTSD of a particular kind. I spoke to Minister Hamish Falconer at the Labour party conference recently, and he was saying that he was involved with the evacuation and has personal experience of this.



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For me, one of the added values of helping to get these artists to safety would be in some way making amends to those young people who have given up their mental health to try to help this country.

**Chair:** That leads us neatly into Rupa's question.

**Dr Huq:** Thank you, everyone. It was lovely to wake up to you on the radio this morning.

**Jimmy Mulville:** I don't think I was awake!

- Q14 **Dr Huq:** I want to ask about the open letter you wrote to the Government. Just reading through your biographies, I have massive respect for all that you have been through in Iran before as well. The letter was cross-party, and I guess it must have been lost in the swirl, as you say, pre-election. It was to David Cameron, Grant Shapps and Lucy Frazer, and the ask was basically for safe passage of creative artists out of Afghanistan. What was the Government's response?

**Jimmy Mulville:** I think we got caught up in the bureaucracy of it. A lot of people were making very helpful noises. We had a very good meeting with Robert Buckland, who outlined the journey of a normal immigration process, which clearly takes a long time and is not guaranteed.

We tried to go down the normal routes. We approached the Home Office and again had a similar response—saying that the protocols of applying for immigration are there, but that they did not think they could be that helpful in this instance. We are coming up against bureaucracy, which is there for a reason—I am not saying it should not be there—but this is an extraordinary situation that would sit outside of these things and needs an extraordinary remedy. We have gone down this road, but we are not getting very far very quickly. That is why we are grateful to be here talking to you about it.

- Q15 **Dr Huq:** Were there sympathetic noises coming back? Was there an official reply, or did it literally get lost in the ether?

**Jimmy Mulville:** We have had lots of sympathetic noises saying, "Yes, this sounds terrible, and we would like to help", but we have had nothing concrete.

- Q16 **Dr Huq:** There was no formal response from those three Departments—Foreign Office, Defence, and Culture?

**Jimmy Mulville:** No.

**Maysam Makhmalbaf:** I think some of the problem they have sometimes is that they do not know how to do it. They think that we do not have enough of a connection, for example, to do it through Iran or to go to Afghanistan and take these people out. What we are asking is not to go and evacuate these people from Afghanistan and Iran, where the UK does not have much of a connection, but from Pakistan, where you have a connection. We say that we can get them to Pakistan, but we are asking that when they get to Pakistan, you say, "We will save these people". If



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they come to Pakistan, they have a two-month period in which they can stay before the Pakistani Government push them back. It is very dangerous after the two months, because they could hand them back directly to the Taliban. If the Taliban look at these people and recognise that they are these artists, that is the end of the road for them.

We are asking that you look at them and see that they have gathered all the information that the Home Office usually asks for. We have their documents and details of who their family members are. We have examples of their work and why they are in danger. For filmmakers, we have their films against the Taliban, and for poets we have their books of poetry about democracy and against fundamentalism. We have all of those gathered already. We have their contact numbers and can reach them in two hours whenever we want to call them to come to Pakistan. They will take the risk to come to Pakistan, but we are asking you, when they get to Pakistan, to help them to come here.

We have tried the route through Germany. Germany did it in this way: we would call people to go to Pakistan, and as soon as they got there, Germany would get them to a guesthouse that it had reserved and do the process for them while the people are in the guesthouse. In that way, they stay there, do not go out and are not in danger of being caught by the police and pushed back. In those eight weeks to two months, they will do their paperwork, they give them a visa and they take them over. We will do the beginning, because it is difficult for the UK Government to get to them, but we are asking you to help us with the last part. You need to check their documents and see that they are legitimate people—that they are these artists at risk—and bring them out.

We are not asking for all of them. We are asking for those who have direct connections with the UK. We have asked France, Germany and the US for those who have connections with those countries. We initiated this from this country; from what we now call our homeland. We are Iranian but we are British citizens now.

We know what would happen to these people if they stayed in their countries. If my father or my sister were in our country, either they would have been killed or they would be in prison and under torture, because of the films they made and the things they say. It is the same thing for these people. The route is very clear and the numbers are so limited. We have a lot of illegal immigrants who come to this country, but these people are asking for a legal route to come to this country. They are qualified people, cultural people, the core of the cultural community in Afghanistan. So we are asking for this, please.

**Q17 Dr Huq:** I remember the pictures of people clinging to the aeroplane, and you have transported us back to that time. As MPs, we were all overwhelmed—we were getting hundreds of people's documents coming in by PDF. It was also covid—it was a strange time—so we were not even meeting in here. There were Zooms, with Ben Wallace mostly. It was very unsatisfactory for us as well, so I am really pleased that you are putting this to the top of everyone's agendas again, because this seems



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so 2021 to a lot of people.

Can you tell us how the UK's response compares with that of other countries and their treatment of creatives? You mentioned France and Hugh Hudson. Are we doing better or worse than our counterparts? What is the situation elsewhere?

**Jimmy Mulville:** We live in hope that the UK will respond in a positive way, and then we can say we have righted the wrong. At the moment—this is the reason why we are here—that has not happened yet. As Maysam said, these are people who have links to the UK through family, professional colleagues or friends, so their natural home would be here. They have become my friends—I have got to know them over the years—and the reason why they are here is that when they were in Iran, they could not do their job for fear for their lives. Now they are here, and since they have been here, they have made 12 films. It is about getting these people into Britain, where they have family connections and can put down roots and become productive members of our society.

Q18 **Dr Huq:** Are there any comparable schemes? With Ukraine, there were schemes—we did one here and other European countries did, too.

**Jimmy Mulville:** The doctors were allowed to go to Scotland—

Q19 **Dr Huq:** I mean for other countries. I know we had the ARAP scheme for translators and certain categories of people. Do we know if any other countries have done anything?

**Jimmy Mulville:** I do not know of any other countries that have.

**Mohsen Makhmalbaf:** Our list went to France, to Germany, to the USA and one person went to Italy. The main problem is with why they should come to this country—the Government always asks, "What is the reason that we should we help them?" The main reason they accept is connection, with family or close friends.

I would love to add something else. We are a family of filmmakers, originally from Iran, and we have made 40 films, 12 of them about Afghanistan. One was called "Afghan Alphabet". In Iran, we had 3 million Afghan refugees in the past, and 700,000 of their children could not go to a school for eight years because they arrived in the country without any visa. For eight years, 700,000 Afghan children were standing outside of their schools, looking to schools with desire, and learning lessons from outside of their schools.

I made "Afghan Alphabet" to show this situation, when Khatami was president of Iran, a man who was more open-minded than others. I showed this film to the Iranian Government and we were finally successful in changing the law. One day we sent half a million of these children to school. We convinced them that if they do not have an education, they go into crime. If you push them back later on, they become your enemy. It is better that you give them the fruit of the culture and education.



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Now, I am talking about those children who lost their education. We need teachers from outside. These artists could be their teachers from here, to educate them through social media. Otherwise, if we forget children, later on, in one generation, we have a movement of terrorism again, because the Taliban is anti the movement of culture. The Taliban is going to have ignorance everywhere. The Taliban is trying to bring Afghanistan back to the 14th century. These people could stop them by giving information and creating art.

Of those people who came to France, some of them have already made films or published novels. For example, if my family was in Iran, the Government would kill us or put us in prison. All 40 films that we made and all 30 books that we published are banned in Iran, but from the moment that we came here, we have received 70 international awards and made 12 films in a few different countries. We were active and we could send our message to Iran, and we could be the voice of the voiceless people of Iran.

As you see, Iran and Afghanistan are somehow the same—they have totalitarianism; they have dictatorship; they put pressure on women; they censor the art activity—but Afghanistan is worse than Iran. Those people could come here and be your colleagues. They could be ambassadors of democracy here.

**Q20 Dr Huq:** I remember that, at that time, I was reading the book by Khaled Hosseini, "A Thousand Splendid Suns", with my son, who had to do it for A-level. It was about how the Taliban had—it was so sad that everything had reversed. It ended very triumphally, blah blah blah.

I notice that the letter sort of asks for help for a third-party back channel of countries for people who have got out. I can imagine the way that Government thinks. Has the argument been put to you—this is a kind of devil's advocate one—that, if you have got somewhere like Germany, as I think you mentioned, those are safe countries? Is that an argument that you have met—that there is no need to come here if they have made it elsewhere?

**Jimmy Mulville:** No. I guess that, being British, I thought that should start off with my Government, and maybe they would be helpful. I mean, I am very happy to take a course on Duolingo and learn German and go and do that over in Germany, but I thought it would be slightly easier for me to get the bus and come here.

**Q21 Dr Huq:** Yes, I am just trying to work out what the resistance was. Lastly, since the change of Government—a new Labour Government—has anything changed?

**Jimmy Mulville:** Well, it is fairly new, but we had some very good meetings up at the Labour party conference. I went up there for a couple of days. Again, people can see the film—they can see the problem—and clearly it is an urgent and present danger that these people are in. So there are a lot of expressions of wanting to help. The question is, how do we crystallise that and focus it, and get it done in a way that means that





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we can navigate the bureaucracy without breaking any rules, just to get a bridge?

It is not that I want to give you a soundbite, but when I saw the film—it is called “The List”—I was reminded of “Schindler’s List”. I was reminded of the spirit of one person trying to just do what he could to try to get as many people out as possible. That is what it is about. It is very simple—it is human beings trying to help other human beings.

Also, if we think that totalitarianism is going to go away, we are mad. I have just come back from America—we have just made “Have I Got News for You” in America for CNN—and they are really worried about free speech being impinged upon, as we do not know what is going to happen with this new Administration. On dictatorships and a free press, 75% of the world does not have a free press, so this is the global virus that is coming, and Britain is the bastion of free speech. I make a programme that criticises politicians every week and makes fun of them, and no one has tried to kill me, yet. I want people to enjoy that kind of freedom, and this is an opportunity that we have. That is why I am talking to you guys.

Q22 **Mr Frith:** Just on that point, Jimmy, I am a big fan of “Have I Got News for You”—

**Jimmy Mulville:** You should come on it.

**Mr Frith:** I would love to. That wasn’t a bid, but—

**Chair:** We would all watch that.

**Mr Frith:** There are more important people to have on, I am sure. You talked about the expression of support and the empathy shared in ministerial meetings with the new Government. Were any clear terms or criteria expressed about what more needs to be done—clunky term—to qualify for some plan?

**Jimmy Mulville:** That is the central question. There are a lot of expressions of empathy and sympathy, but the subtext is a bit of hand-wringing about how we do it. When grabbing a conversation over coffee with a Labour politician for half an hour at the conference, we are not going to come up with any solutions. My job up there was to create some kind of bridge, to get some access to people and to follow it up after that. In the next few months, we will go on more of a campaign. This is about raising awareness, and getting on people’s radars to think about, because you are all busy people—it is about getting the amount of bandwidth, so that we can concentrate on coming up with a clear way of delivering. This is not a big deal; this is 281 people, who would come here and create their own living, and add to the culture. In doing so, we will have all kinds of side benefits—the military, I think, would see it as a win for them, because a lot are sitting at home, thinking, “Why did we spend 20 years in Afghanistan?”

Q23 **Mr Frith:** What is the block then, when it is such a fraction of a number?



**Jimmy Mulville:** Earlier on this year, in Portcullis House, the feeling was, “The election is coming”, and anything around immigration was a difficult thing to embrace. I keep saying, “This is not immigration or asylum seeking; this is a humanitarian evacuation, similar to Ukraine”—but then we have the news cycle. As Hana alluded to, in 2021 we all saw those terrible images, but then we had Ukraine and then Gaza. The news cycle is voracious and moves so quickly these days, but what happened in 2021 is still happening to these people. That is why the film is so powerful: it reminds us. That is why we think that we need to get the job done. It is the last thing that we can do: to get these people out. Other people I know want to come out, and these people are not more important than those people, but they are at higher risk, because they are visible, high profile and easily spotted.

Q24 **Mr Alaba:** Mohsen, you mentioned saving the culture. This seems to feed into your point: yes, it is humanitarian, but it is about saving the culture as well.

**Mohsen Makhmalbaf:** Also, it is the narrative. Now we are at war with the narration. The Taliban narrative can control the country. The whole army from the West somehow failed in Afghanistan and left—50,000 Taliban could overcome the whole army of the world. Now, who is strong enough to overcome the Taliban? Artists, who can fight them in the narration. We need colleagues for good narration, because the Taliban is an anti-cultural movement. What is against the Taliban? Culture. We need colleagues here to create, to produce culture in a way that matches Afghan culture. You need these people. They benefit the West as well; it is not just saving people, but saving culture and having colleagues here to fight for democracy through our culture, to teach Afghan children how they can think openly.

**Paul Waugh:** Mohsen, you are a founding father of modern Persian cinema. You have a great record. Hana, too, you are a fantastic filmmaker. Thanks so much for coming today and expressing your wish to help others in a similar situation. Will you say a little about your own experience of threats and attempted harm, and how that is similar to what is going on right now for the current generation of filmmakers?

**Mohsen Makhmalbaf:** When we were in Iran, the situation was a little better. That is why we could produce films, write and publish books, and do NGO activity. When the situation got worse, and all my work was banned, I went to Afghanistan to stay there and to make films there, but Iran sent terrorists to kill us. They exploded a bomb during our shooting, to kill our family. On our shoot in north Afghanistan, 20% were injured. That is why we moved to Tajikistan and then to Paris. Then they again sent terrorists to kill me; the French police put in place seven bodyguards for months for me. They were following us because they know how effective our work is.

The same thing is happening again in Iran for the artists. The Iranian Government have killed many artists. When I say “artists”, I mean every kind of art—filmmaking, writing books, dancing and making music—and



not just painting. Nowadays, artists are in danger in Iran. You hear in the news that suddenly one of the filmmakers has disappeared or committed suicide, or someone attacked him, like what happened with “The Gardener”. It is the strategy of Government to kill them in different ways or by “accident”.

So nowadays totalitarianism in Iran, plus dictatorship, can control everything. But Iranian artists are more clever. They make films with their mobile phone and they send them outside. Or, when they come out, they are using social media or TV channels from abroad to talk with the nation. That is why you see every year we have some sort of movement—for example, the women’s movement. For a few months, a million Iranian people were in the street screaming because they wanted to get rid of the scarf on their head.

I think the situations of Afghanistan and Iran are the same, because 270 years ago we were the same country. We divided. But the destiny was the same. Both countries had totalitarianism. Both countries have fundamentalism. Both countries control and put pressure on women and can control the culture. But the awareness was more in Iran than in Afghanistan, because we had more artists who were active. The Afghanistan artists are rare, really, because they were under more pressure from the system. Before the Soviets came there, they had secularism. When the Soviets came, they brought social realism—just one way of thinking in the way of art.

The Taliban deleted all the culture. In the first period of the Taliban, they did not have TV, radio or newspapers. If you even took an image, you were beaten. Now the situations of Iran and Afghanistan are the same, but because we have more artists and are more active in art and culture, the Iranians are alive; they wake up. They do not like the regime. This is the problem. Okay, they can control the country, but they cannot manage the country. The Iranian Government are so fragile because we have 3 million people with a PhD in Iran. But Afghanistan, for 20 years, was cut out of having education. Imagine that. If you shut down TV channels and radio, closed the universities and did not let girls go to high school, in 20 years what would happen to this culture? This culture would disappear.

Q25 **Paul Waugh:** Hana, what has your experience been?

**Hana Makhmalbaf:** Actually, I am one of them—I am one of those artists. I lived their life. I was in Iran back in 2009, when the Green movement happened. I was in the streets. I saw the same thing. What was happening in front of me touched my heart. The dictator Government of Iran was killing people in the street just because they asked, “Where is our vote?”

Back then it was, again, my instinct to turn on my camera and start filming what was happening. I remember that back then, again, I had all these rushes. They arrested me a few times and they took away my rushes. Then, when the coup d’état happened and the other dictator, the



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President, came in there, I had to run away from Iran. Thank God I had this chance.

I came out with a fake name and everything, and I saved my rushes and my footage. I remember that back then my dad went to the Parliament of France, to Kouchner's office, and to the European Parliament and announced that a coup d'état was happening. Then he tried to save the journalists who were imprisoned in Iran, who were under the threat of execution or under torture. So this is something I have lived myself. That is why I relate to it completely—I have been living it.

**Q26 Paul Waugh:** Jimmy, what difficulties do you think creative artists have had in accessing the current British resettlement scheme? In particular, do you think that some of the people coming over by boat are doing that because there is no other route?

**Jimmy Mulville:** I do not know the answer to that. I do not have that kind of information. Like I said, we have had a lot of helpful responses to our suggestion of bringing these people out but, I do not know, I would imagine some of them have been that desperate to try to make that journey. We are not aware of anyone that has done that. Certainly, nobody on our list has done that.

It needs to be said that Mohsen has this list—we have their details, their passport details, and their locations. For obvious reasons, it is all under wraps, but these people are well documented. We can prove what they do, we have their work, we can send you links to show you what they have done. They also have contacts here.

**Q27 Paul Waugh:** But have they had difficulties accessing the resettlement scheme?

**Jimmy Mulville:** Yes, it is very difficult.

**Q28 Liz Jarvis:** Thinking longer term, what impact do you think your campaign has had on support for creative artists seeking refuge globally?

**Mohsen Makhmalbaf:** My campaign can affect journalism first but at the end, we need response from government. For example, we had a campaign for France and Macron accepted that. But in France, when Macron signed our request, it happened immediately. Here we should meet each MP because here party is stronger than France. In France, one person can make the decision.

The campaign can bring attention to the things we have forgotten just because there are lots of things to think about. For example, you have Ukraine, Gaza, or economic issues. This campaign can bring attention to those things which are important but forgotten. I think it is very important that we are here. If you help us to be here, you connect us to the Government, push them to listen to us because we have enough reasons to convince them. It is not just for them; it is also for you. You need people from Afghanistan to be aware of the news every day, to help you fight Talibanism and their anti-culture approach. I think the campaign is the only way, but sometimes when an international issue is happening,



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like in 2021, and you knock on the door of different Governments, they answer faster. But when the issue is hidden, the answer needs time. We are in this moment now.

**Jimmy Mulville:** It is a very interesting question. It made me think about other cultures. I read recently that the Chinese Government shut down a bookshop in Hong Kong because they thought the books were dangerous. That is an interesting thing, that a Government finds a book dangerous. These kinds of Governments, they find thinking is dangerous for them. Disobedience—creative and conscious—is a good thing, because if you are disobedient to a system that you do not believe in, that is how you change it. These Governments do not allow that. Art and free expression do. I think it will resonate with other communities going through something similar.

Q29 **Liz Jarvis:** Do you think there is a tendency internationally to treat creative artists as though they are not in danger, or not in need of refuge?

**Jimmy Mulville:** Possibly. Well, certainly. Ironically, these people have been successful. When the Taliban were not in power, they were very successful. Ironically, that success has put them in mortal danger. If you are successful in a free country, it is a good thing—it is a benefit to you and to other people around you. There, it is actually a death sentence. There is an assumption that if you are a creative artist, life is good, but not in countries like this—not in countries where an actor jumps out of a window rather than get caught by the Taliban.

**Maysam Makhmalbaf:** To add to that, we know that these artists are important and have influence over the country because they talked to TV networks outside. The Government said that they will kill any of these artists who talk to Afghanistan International, BBC Persian in London, or other TV networks outside. That shows that when these people talk, they have influence over their society. That is why we are asking for them to be brought out of the country, so that they can talk back to the country and help shape the next generation to be more open-minded, as ambassadors of the best democracy. There are very few people who could do this in Afghanistan, and they are at the core of the culture. We need to help them.

**Hana Makhmalbaf:** I made two other movies about Afghanistan. One of them was when I was 13 years old, which was just after the Taliban had left the country. That movie is about the fear of women who are under the burqa. We were trying to bring these women to act in another movie, but they were scared about what would happen to them if the Taliban were to return. This is what really happened to them—the Taliban returned. At that point, I could not understand why they were scared, but it happened to them.

I made another movie when I was 17 years old, which was in the Berlin film festival in 2007. The movie was about children and how war and terrorism affect them. Before the last 20 years, the world was bringing



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violence to Afghanistan all the time, whether it was the Soviet Union, internal war, or even America. They were brought war and violence in hope of democracy, but in the past 20 years, people have had a window open to breathe a bit of culture and education. That is now closing back up, but we had the hope.

If you asked us 20 years ago, we would have said there is no hope, because there is nothing, but now we have these educated people. You educated them—opportunity gave them education. Now we can send them back instead of bombs to these children. We can send this education and culture back instead of a bomb explosion from America or the UK. We can send them back all this art and culture. There are all our soldiers that you raised in Afghanistan during the past 20 years. I am a soldier of culture with my camera. I am shooting the ignorance of people. These artists are all soldiers against the Taliban, shooting the ignorance of people. The Taliban are trying to put people in darkness, but artists are shooting those prisons and cages. That is why these people are really important.

**Chair:** Thank you very much. That was very powerful, Hana.

**Q30 Mr Frith:** Yes, that was very eloquently and powerfully put. You have talked about the creative arts flourishing in the period between 2001 and 2021, after the first period of Taliban rule. Should we have expectations of seeing what comes next for Afghan artists who are still in Afghanistan? Does it become a resistance movement, or is that overly romantic as a notion, when you have talked about this being survival and hiding from execution and torture?

**Hana Makhmalbaf:** That is what we are here for. If they are in the country, all they are thinking about is surviving another day in hiding. Imagine if the Minister of Culture in power was hiding in the mountains. Imagine what the situation would be for an artist like me, who is just a filmmaker with a camera, especially if that artist is a woman. They would then be hiding under a burqa in their house, they would not be able to talk loudly, and they would just be saving themselves. We have seen some of those artists leave the country over the past few years, such as those we have saved, and some have gone on to make theatre in France—I think one lady won an Emmy award.

We see the news, and on Afghanistan International, we have seen artists talk about Afghanistan. As an Iranian, I have been to Afghanistan, but I do not know their culture exactly, and an Afghan person who lives there everyday can talk back to the people in Afghanistan and have an effect on them. Of course, if those artists are outside the country, they can have an effect back there. They are not coming to fill someone else's place; they are coming to fill the empty gap we have. When they were looking for people to work in Afghanistan International, or when they were asking for people to talk on BBC Persian about Afghanistan, we wanted to see people who are very educated and aware of the situation back there. I think we need those people to be here of their own accord. Hopefully, one day—instead of my father, brother and I sitting here as Iranian artists—they



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themselves will sit here and talk about their issues as artists, rather than us as Iranian people.

- Q31 **Chair:** As a Committee, we will consider everything we have heard from you today, and we will present our thoughts to the Government. If the Government were sitting here in our place today, and you had a short message for them, what would it be, Jimmy?

**Jimmy Mulville:** It would be, "Do the right thing." It would cost the Government very little. Like I said to your point, James, these people can create artistic resistance to a totalitarian Government only if they are here. They cannot do it there because they would be killed, and so the pen is not mightier than sword in this respect. Really, I do not know the reason why they would not do it. Often in life there are things that you cannot do, and when I saw this film, I thought, "I can't help here." Any Government with a conscience should look at this and say, "I can't ignore this. I have to do something about it." That is the right thing to do. On all kinds of levels we have explored it this morning over 90 minutes, and I just cannot see any reason why we would not do this.

- Q32 **Chair:** Does anyone have anything to add?

**Mohsen Makhmalbaf:** We believe that culture is often the light that we put on darkness to make the invisible visible. Afghanistan is dark now, and we need that light. Also, culture is often like a mirror in front of society. When you go in front of a mirror, you want to check your face and change it if something is wrong. We use culture and art like a mirror in front of society to let Governments change something wrong with their faces. We need that light. Also, culture and art are the bridge between the cultures of different countries, but that bridge is now collapsing. We ask the UK Government not to let that light turn off. Do not let that mirror break. Do not let that bridge collapse.

**Chair:** I thank all of you for not only your evidence today but your incredible work in raising the plight of creatives in Afghanistan. I think we have all taken a lot from what you have told us today, and we will consider between us how we take this issue forward and send a message to the Government on your behalf to support those who are most at risk. Thank you very much for your time.