

Day-to-Day-Business in Judicial Institutions Up Close

After four years of studying, Sumaia and Lida have gained profound knowledge of Afghanistan's legal foundations. Since she was a young girl, Sumaia has wanted to become a lawyer: "In ninth grade, I was already aware of the miserable situation of women in my country. One of my distant relatives was beaten by her husband. She had to work, take care of the children, managed the household, and he didn't do anything. Such situations are not uncommon in this country. I became a lawyer to help women find a way out of their situation."

The young woman already reached her first goal: graduating with a Bachelor's degree from the legal faculty of Balkh University in Mazar-e Sharif. 26-year-old Lida gained her bachelor's degree at the Sharia faculty of Balkh University.

After completing their studies, however, they did not yet know how the extensive legal set of rules can be applied and utilised in practice. On the ACBAR website (Afghan employment website), the two graduates discovered an offer for a six-month internship at the judicial authority in Mazar-e Sharif, financially supported by the German government. They were successful and got the internship. Travel expenses, allowance for food and a small salary made it possible for the freshly graduated lawyers to apply their theoretical skills in practice: criminal and civil law, juvenile law, public law, and the huquq department (comparable to arbitration), which coordinates mediators.

Together with experienced colleagues, the two women managed day-to-day business. They studied files of new cases, checked them legally, discussed them with the prosecutor and organised public defenders for defendants who could not afford a lawyer. Lida explains: "This work differs completely from what we did at the university. It is much more interesting to work on real cases, get to know the people involved and to become a part of the whole legal process." Depending on the department, the young women faced different challenges. During her time at the huquq department, Lida learnt how the huquq (mediator) deals with the opposing parties, how he treats them, and offers solutions for conflicts. She starts beaming when thinking about it: "At the huquq department I learnt how mediation works. The huquq succeeds in reconciling totally divided parties, making both sides happy. It was very exciting to experience this."

Before starting her internship, Sumaia had already gained practical experience at the bar association. After a short induction phase, the head of



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the judicial authority allowed her to work in the legal aid department as legal advisor for women and children in civil cases. For Sumaia, this meant a unique opportunity to gather experience: “I was allowed to work on real cases. Altogether, I worked on 25 disputes during my internship. I was able to gather a lot of experience and to work my dream job – to help women out of their misery.”

It is Sumaia’s big goal to become a judge. She still has a long way to go, though. The young woman will need a master’s degree and at least two years of work experience in Kabul. Presently, she works in administration to save up money for her studies. Sumaia still considers herself lucky: “My parents motivate me to continue my education and support me as much as they can. The whole family encourages me, this is something very special in Afghanistan.”

Lida managed to get a job in the rule of law programme of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH. In her job, she is in close contact with the judicial authority and organises internships for the next generation of law students. At the moment, she still lacks the money for a master’s degree. The job is a good opportunity to keep working in her field of expertise and to save money at the same time. Thoughtfully, she explains: “The situation for women in Afghanistan is really very bad. It is difficult to get a job. We are being discriminated everywhere. The reason for my career choice is quite simple: I want to end discrimination and defend women’s rights in our society!”

Regarding their finished internships, they both agree: “We will never forget what we learnt during the internship. If we ever forget anything, maybe the theory we studied at university, but surely never the challenges of daily business.”

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