

Zahra, ChilOut Ambassador, 2004

Zahra, 18, is a student at Holroyd High in western Sydney, NSW. Following her father's murder by the Taliban, Zahra fled from Afghanistan to Pakistan in 1998, where she lived in a refugee camp for a year. She and her mother and little brother came to Australia as part of the offshore humanitarian program. While Zahra has not been detained in Australia, she has plenty of friends who have been.

Zahra's report on the ChilOut Amabssadors' trip to Canberra, 11 March 2004

I basically told the politicians practically everything I had to tell, except Minister Vanstone, as she didn't give us that much chance to speak and she didn't answer straightly to our questions. I personally think that politicians may want to help us, and the refugees to free them, and but not Minister Vanstone.

Also I told the politicians about the experiences that I had as a refugee about six years ago in Pakistan when we escaped from Afghanistan because of the war and torture. Also the loss of people in my life including my father, and so I told Minister Vanstone if my best friend's family [Nahid—one of the other Ambassadors] was sent back to our homeland, I would again lose someone very close to me from my life as I have already lost a lot of my loved ones in my life and I think I may suffer depression if I lose anyone else from my life.

Sometimes it was like Senator Vanstone just wasn't listening. Like she'd made up her mind before we even came. Actually the whole process from the start was a surprise for me but the very surprising part was that I didn't expect the Minister for Immigration to be like this at all, and the second surprise was that John Howard actually waved to us; I guess he was in a very good mood that day on Thursday when we were in the Parliament.

I used to think there aren't any nice people out there but this trip has made sure to me that there are still some nice people left out there and my voice was heard for the first time in my entire life in the media (and especially by the other Ambassadors).

I would like to give as much help as I can to the refugees, especially for the kids in detention centres and also to other victims of war and torture of any kind.