



ZONTA
INTERNATIONAL
DISTRICT 13

District 13 Conference
4th – 7th September 2025
Vilnius, Lithuania



Leading with purpose – Rising together – Empowering District 13 Zontians



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Keynote Razan Haugaard

Leading with purpose – Rising together – Empowering District 13 Zontians

It's women like me they call victims

By Razan Haugaard

Author, Coach, Speaker, and
Consultant in the Field of
Integration





Who am I?

- I came to Denmark at the age of 17 in 1990 with my Kurdish ex-husband. Today, I am the mother of four children aged 38, 35, 21, and 19, and grandmother to five-year-old twin girls.
- I live in Hellerup. I am educated as a graphic designer, webmaster, and interaction designer with 12 years of experience from TDC and Lundbeck, where I worked with digital solutions and visual communication. For the past 13 years, I have worked with integration and diversity.
- I am currently a consultant in Solrød Municipality and a member of the storytelling corps under Mærk, where I share personal stories.



A childhood between traditions and freedom

- I grew up in a lively and loving extended family with seven siblings – five girls and three boys. Our daily life was deeply rooted in a cultural-religious approach, where traditions and norms shaped the framework for our lives and community.

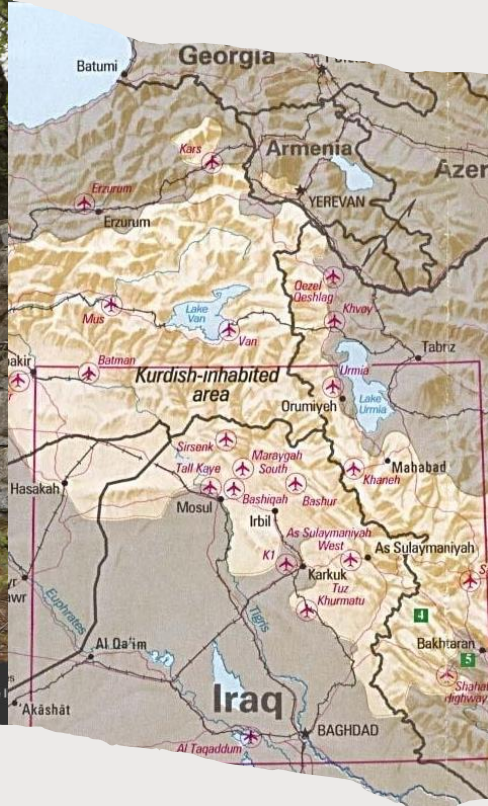




Child bride at the age of 13!

- When I was 13, I was forced into marriage. I had no say in the decision – and no idea what marriage truly entailed. Suddenly, I found myself in an adult world filled with responsibilities, expectations, and a role I had not chosen for myself.





I survived a bomb attack – and was dug out after 17 hours."

The Halabja chemical attack

- Halabja was struck by a brutal chemical gas attack. Thousands of civilians lost their lives, and we were forced to flee in haste. The escape first took us to Iran, then on to Syria, and finally to Romania. It marked the beginning of a life in exile – and the start of yet another long and painful struggle for survival.

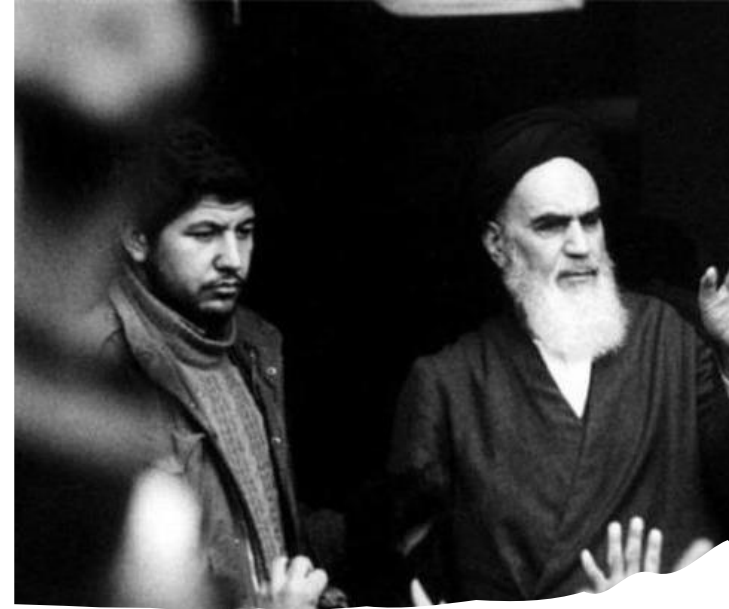




72 hours through the mountains – the escape to Iran

- We walked for three days through snow and freezing cold, without food or warmth. Some carried small children, others supported one another. Many died along the way, but we survived and reached the border to Iran.





The escape lasted two years – and life in hiding in Iran
We lived in Iran for 1.5 years without legal residency.
Eventually, we bought fake passports through smugglers
to be able to move on. The escape lasted two years – filled
with fear and hope.



New country

On September 13, 1990, we landed at Kastrup Airport.



Everything was reset – a new beginning in Denmark.

At the age of 17, I arrived in Denmark with two small children – one 2.5 years old and a 6-month-old baby. I didn't know the language, the culture, or the religion. Everything I knew was gone. I stood alone, with my children, in a foreign country – and had to start over.



The first love!

Forgiveness and reunion with my mother

Many years later, I saw my mother again. There was anger, sorrow, and silence between us. But I no longer carried hatred.

I chose to forgive her – not for her sake, but for my own.





SKILSMISSE

A different kind of wealth

—

The journey to my roots



“You haven’t tried that before, so you’ll probably manage”

Integration work inspired by Pippi Longstocking.



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