

Taban Shores

Founder, The Lotus Flower

A child genocide survivor, Taban is the founder of The Lotus Flower, a non-profit for vulnerable women and girls that currently works in Kurdistan, Northern Iraq with survivors of conflict.

Currently, the charity has three centres in the Kurdistan region of Iraq and strives for their safety, accessibility to education, empowering them to participate in the communities, and driving social and economic development. It has helped over 16,000 women and girls to date.

With a political activist father, Taban's family were on Saddam Hussein's 'Most Wanted' list, and at the age of four, the secret police arrived at her home arresting her mother and paternal grandparents. Taban was imprisoned for two weeks with her family before they narrowly escaped being buried alive and becoming part of the Kurdish (Anfal) genocide in 1986.



After three months in hiding, and twelve months fleeing, dodging mines, bombs and bullets, the Shores family finally arrived in Iran but her father was poisoned by Saddam Hussein. Amnesty International flew him to the UK for medical treatment in 1987. The rest of the family arrived in the UK one year later in 1988. Despite the impact of the trauma, which would lay dormant in her for many years, a relatively normal childhood ensued.

Through her teen years, Taban studied and then married at age 19. She became a mother at age 20. She then balanced a career in an Investment Asset Management firm while raising her son.

Taban's early years of trauma seemed behind her, though she remained acutely aware of the many thousands of Kurds back in Kurdistan impacted by the massacre. Life had moved into a semblance of normality, but in April 2014 when she was asked by the Kurdistan Regional Government to speak publicly for the first time about her experiences in the House of Lords, everything changed.

The experience of using her voice to bring awareness to the suffering of her people triggered a shift in Taban's career. With the blessing of the company CEO, she soon found herself on a helicopter as part of a rescue mission distributing aid to displaced Yezidi's trapped on Mount Sinjar.

While everyone was fleeing ISIS, Taban broke cultural boundaries as a woman in what was seen as a man's role - to be on board the dangerous mission with Rwanda "That helicopter mission changed everything. I knew life couldn't be the same again. I had found my calling."

Taban stayed in the region for fifteen months with her eleven-year-old son, witnessing a new humanitarian crisis in her homeland that displaced 2.6 million people. During this time she participated in various charitable activities with the Rwanda Foundation, which included building schools.

In 2016, the charity was registered as a non-profit without having clarity on what the initiative was. The *why*, completely preceded the *how*, with Taban clear only on one thing - that she was going to help girls and women impacted by the conflict and displacement, to rebuild their lives. Today, the charity's pillars are education, livelihood, well-being, mental health, peacebuilding and human rights and gender equality.

Taban's contributions are numerous. In September 2018, a statue of Taban was erected in central London as one of twenty-five incredible women honoured for their impact on the world as part of the '*Put Her Forward*' initiative. She was honoured with the Hearst Bravery Award in 2014, and she was a finalist in Red magazine's prestigious Women of the Year awards in 2016.

Winning a Peace Award by the Universal Peace Federation, Taban delivered an unforgettable keynote speech at One Young World in Bogota alongside Sir Bob Geldof, the late Kofi Annan and many other notable world figures in 2017.