

Pride Month! Muhammad Zubair

June is Pride Month! At AFIMSC, we celebrate the heritage, culture and diversity of our teammates. Muhammad Zubair opens up about his experiences growing up as a gay man in Pakistan before joining AFIMSC.

By Muhammad Zubair, AFIMSC Detachment 4

I was born in Karachi, Pakistan, where it is a crime to be gay and the penalty can be life in prison or even death.

I immigrated to Germany 5½ years ago, and I have been working as a local national for the Air Force Installation and Mission Support Center's Detachment 4 at Ramstein Air Base, Germany, for the past two years.

It took a lot of courage for me to leave my family and friends in Pakistan and move to a strange country where I didn't know anyone and couldn't even speak the language. I had to start a new life, but I felt like there was kind of a push for me from the universe to leave my homeland. I had always been looking for an escape, so I could live my truth without fear of persecution or even death.

Living in Pakistan as a gay man, I had to deal with so many problems and I lived under constant stress and fear. I experienced many horrible things that happened to me in Pakistan. I was beaten, tortured, raped and humiliated, but I survived.

Many violent crimes are committed against gays in my country, but there are no consequences. Whenever anything happened to me, I didn't know what to do, where to go or who to talk to. I felt all alone and I couldn't talk to anyone about what was happening to me, since it is a crime to be gay and talking to anyone would only create more problems.

When things got worse, I even tried to commit suicide. This was not the right decision or even my destiny. After two days I finally woke up and I felt embarrassed and I wondered how I could possibly face my family and all their questions. Fortunately they didn't dig too deep and they primarily wanted to know where I got the sleeping pills.

My family was understanding and they were happy that I was alive, although I never told them the truth and I eventually started to pretend like nothing ever happened. After that I began to focus more on my studies and my career. I figured there was no other way for me, so I thought it would be better to just get lost in this life and try to live a 'normal' life like other people. I completed a double Masters' degree in Finance and Supply Chain Management, but I never came out to anyone when I lived there.





After moving to Germany it took me awhile to feel comfortable being openly gay. Once I realized how accepting the society was here, it finally made me feel safe and I could live my truth. When I started working for AFIMSC Det 4 in 2020, I was a little nervous about what it was going to be like working for the military and being gay, but my organization is amazing.

I have never felt any discrimination and my organization's commander, my boss, my supervisor and all of my coworkers have been very friendly and welcoming. They always make me feel like part of the team and I feel very blessed to be part of this organization. I can honestly say that our organization's slogan is a perfect fit for me – IAMIMSC.

Talking about my past is never easy and when I think about it, my body starts to shiver. It also makes me very emotional when I think about that phase of my life and all

the trauma I experienced, because I am gay. I hope no one else has to go through what I had to, but fortunately I feel safe now and I hope that everyone can feel safe to live their life.

Happy **Pride!**