

## Afghanistan: End systematic killings of Hazaras and prevent possible genocide

(7 October 2022, Bangkok) — In a suicide attack on Kaj Education Center in Dasht-e-Barchi West Kabul on 30 September, 53 civilians were killed, among them at least 46 young girls. Approximately 110 were injured.<sup>1</sup> The attack targeted Hazara students who gathered to take a university mock exam in West Kabul, an area home to the Shia Hazara community and known for the repeated bloody attacks on them.

The toll of casualties traced on the ground is likely to be higher than the data provided by the de facto authorities. Following the attack, dozens of Afghan women in Herat and Bamiyan protested the systematic killings of Hazara and the continued restrictions on women. In response, the Taliban reportedly oppressed protestors with violence<sup>2</sup> and harassed the families of victims in Kabul.<sup>3</sup>

The Taliban has not taken responsibility for the recent attack, but in recent years, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) have claimed responsibility for similar attacks on the Hazara community. ISIS has targeted gatherings, particularly in education centres, including the May 2021 attack on the same Hazara neighbourhood that killed 58 Hazara civilians.<sup>4</sup>

Afghanistan's Hazara community is a predominantly Shia Muslim ethnic group that has faced systematic discrimination, hatred and harsh persecution for over a century in Afghanistan, mainly due to their ethnic and religious identities.

'The Taliban and other Sunni extremists, notably Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISIS-KP), view the Hazaras as a sworn enemy primarily because of their Shi'a faith.'<sup>5</sup> The Hazara community has historically been subjected to persecution including repeated massacres, slavery, forced displacement and forced conversion (from Shia to Sunni)<sup>6</sup>, and displacement from their ancestral lands.

The systematic violence against Hazaras can be traced back to 1891 - 1893 when the Afghan King Amir Abdur Rahman Khan declared<sup>7</sup> holy war and led a genocidal campaign of violence against Hazaras. More than half of the Hazaras' overall population in Afghanistan were massacred, forced to flee or taken into slavery during the war.<sup>8</sup>

The size, pattern and targets of the ongoing attacks against the Hazara community, in addition to the public glorification of violence and hatred towards them by terrorist groups and Sunni hardliners, can clearly constitute evidence of genocide, according to the 1948 Genocide Convention of the United Nations.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>1</sup> UNAMA News, Twitter Post, October 3, 2022, 7.01pm, <https://twitter.com/unamanews/status/1576905370450075648>

<sup>2</sup> BBC Dari, Twitter post, October 2, 2022, 10.26pm, <https://twitter.com/bbcdfghanistan/status/1576594414687789057>

<sup>3</sup> Nilofar Ayubi, Twitter Post, September 20, 2022, 5.57pm, <https://twitter.com/NilofarAyoubi/status/1575802121936461825>

<sup>4</sup> Shadi Khan Saif. 2021. Kabul school blasts death toll rises to 58 (aa.com.tr)

<sup>5</sup> United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. 2022. Urgent Action Needed: Hazaras in Afghanistan Under Attack. [online] <https://www.ushmm.org/genocide-prevention/blog/urgent-action-needed-hazaras-in-afghanistan-under-attack>

<sup>6</sup> Niamathullah Ibrahimy, 2016. *Hazaras and the Afghan State*. C Hurst & Co Pub Ltd, p.84

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p.76

<sup>8</sup> Minority Rights Group International. Hazaras. [online] <https://minorityrights.org/minorities/hazaras/>

<sup>9</sup> United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention, Genocide Convention, <https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/genocide.shtml>

ISIS' public statements to 'kill Shia Hazaras everywhere' proves its intention of a deliberate policy behind the mass killings. In 2021, ISIS publicly stated that it would target Shias/Hazaras.<sup>10</sup> Killings of Hazaras have been widespread, from maternity wards and public transportation to places of worship.

Although Afghanistan has been a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide since 1956,<sup>11</sup> the systematic persecution of Hazaras, which could constitute evidence of genocide, did not cease under the former Republic government in Afghanistan. Violence against Hazaras resurged before the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan in 2021.

In the first half of 2021 alone, the United Nations documented 20 attacks against Shias/Hazaras, resulting in 143 Hazara civilians killed and more than 300 wounded, bringing the death toll of civilians to 500.<sup>12</sup>

The Taliban massacred thousands of Hazaras in Balkh<sup>13</sup> and Bamiyan provinces during their first rule in the 1990s.<sup>14</sup> Their brutality against the Hazara community has continued following their most recent takeover. Despite promises to protect Hazaras,<sup>15</sup> the Taliban has attacked the community repeatedly, including on 30 August 2021, when 13 Hazara men were killed by the Taliban.

As of July 2022, an estimated 25,000 civilians, primarily Hazaras, have been forcibly displaced from their ancestral lands through the Taliban's military campaign across Afghanistan.<sup>16</sup>

Hazaras are not the only minorities to suffer under the Taliban regime. In the absence of any accountability from the de facto authorities, human rights violations of vulnerable groups, including ethno-religious communities, have intensified since the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan. Cases of enforced displacement, extra-judicial and systematic killings, enforced disappearances of Hazaras, and persecution of Sikhs and Hindus, Sofis, Tajiks and Uzbeks continue to rise.<sup>17</sup>

The risks of persecution and possible genocide of Hazaras/Shias escalate in the face of continued brutality by the Islamic State-Khorasan Province (IS-K) across Afghanistan. Since the Taliban takeover, at least 700 Hazara civilians have been killed or injured in 13 IS-K targeted attacks.<sup>18</sup>

Almost all of these attacks bear the same pattern of violence: the targeting of women, children and young students in schools, mosques, hospitals, sports centers and even public transportation.

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<sup>10</sup> Human Rights Watch. 2021. Afghanistan: Surge in Islamic State Attacks on Shia. [online] <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/10/25/afghanistan-surge-islamic-state-attacks-shia>

<sup>11</sup> United Nations Treaty Collection, [https://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtdsg\\_no=IV-1&chapter=4&clang=\\_en](https://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtdsg_no=IV-1&chapter=4&clang=_en)

<sup>12</sup> United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, 2021, Total Civilian Casualties 1 January to 30 June 2009-2021. <https://unama.unmissions.org/civilian-casualties-set-hit-unprecedented-highs-2021-unless-urgent-action-stem-violence-%E2%80%93-un-report>

<sup>13</sup> Human Rights Watch. 1998. Afghanistan: Surge in Islamic State Attacks on Shia. [online] <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/10/25/afghanistan-surge-islamic-state-attacks-shia>

<sup>14</sup> Farkhondeh Akbar, 2022, George Washington University, <https://extremism.gwu.edu/risks-facing-hazaras-taliban-ruled-afghanistan>

<sup>15</sup> Margareritha Stacanti. and Ehsanullah Amiri, 2021. Taliban Reach Out to Shiite Hazara Minority, Seeking Unity and Iran Ties. [online] The Wall Street Journal. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/taliban-reach-out-to-shiite-hazara-minority-seeking-unity-and-iran-ties-11630599286>

<sup>16</sup> US Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2022, <https://www.ushmm.org/genocide-prevention/blog/urgent-action-needed-hazaras-in-afghanistan-under-attack>

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Human Rights Watch. 2022. Afghanistan: ISIS Group Targets Religious Minorities. [online] <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/09/06/afghanistan-isis-group-targets-religious-minorities>

As the Hazaras experience increasing bloody attacks, international groups and monitoring bodies have expressed serious concerns over the risks of increasing attacks, possibly leading to genocide.<sup>19</sup>

FORUM-ASIA is concerned that the Hazaras are at serious risk of genocide in Afghanistan. We condemn the Taliban for its failure and unwillingness to protect ethno-religious minorities, and its repression and harassment of protestors and victims' families.

FORUM-ASIA urges the international community and calls on all States to:

- a) Push to stop the systematic persecution of the Hazaras and other ethnic and religious groups in Afghanistan. States should facilitate the resettlement of members of the most vulnerable groups and those in urgent need of protection;
- b) Abide by the principles of the Genocide Convention and under the United Nations doctrine of Responsibility to Protect, recognise the historical and systemic persecution of Hazaras that could constitute genocide;
- c) Urge all stakeholders to take concrete steps that would put an end to the persecution of ethno-religious groups in Afghanistan; and
- d) Establish an accountability and protection mechanism that documents and investigates the gross violations of human rights, including but not limited to the massacre of ethnic and religious minorities, such as the Hazaras in Afghanistan.

— END —

#### **About FORUM-ASIA:**

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<sup>19</sup> In January 2022, the House of Lords Select Committee on International Relations and Defence published its report on Afghanistan stating that 'The Hazaras have a long history of suffering state persecution on both ethnic and sectarian grounds.' This report follows warnings from Amnesty International, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and Genocide Watch noting increasing levels of violence directed towards the Hazara community and highlighting the risk of a possible genocide.