

**San Jose State University Human Rights Institute**

**Human Rights Conditions for Hazaras in Afghanistan Under the Taliban Regime**

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**INTRODUCTION**

After the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021, ethnic Hazaras in Kabul City and other areas in the country were subjected to systematic human rights abuses and targeted in planned attacks on schools, mosques and public streets. ISIS-K took responsibility for many of the attacks, but Taliban soldiers also engaged in human rights abuses against members of Hazara communities. Further, the Taliban regime seems to tolerate discrimination and violence towards Hazaras. Hazara people are an ethnic minority group who live largely in the central mountainous region of Afghanistan (Hazarajat). Population estimates<sup>1</sup> suggest Hazaras make up about 10-20% of the Afghan population, but it's difficult to find current, reliable statistics. Most Hazaras are Shia Muslims—religious minorities in Afghanistan who speak Hazaragi and Dari, two dialects of Farsi.

Since the fall of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (2001-2021) and the withdrawal of US forces, living conditions for many people in Afghanistan have worsened. Governmental services shut down, the Afghan currency quickly dropped in value, food costs skyrocketed, hundreds of thousands of Afghans fled the country, most international organizations closed their offices, and security deteriorated.

These factors have affected many Afghans living across the country but especially Hazara communities, who were also discriminated against and attacked under the previous Taliban regime in the late 1990s. Today Hazara communities are facing increased threats of arbitrary arrest, disappearance, loss of employment and education, denial of humanitarian aid, and forced displacement. Hazaras who were members of the military and police of the former Afghan government told the SJSU HRI that they are doubly at risk because of their ethnicity. Hazara journalists and women's rights activists say they are being censored and surveilled more than others and face harsher punishments when stopped by Taliban soldiers. Hazara women and girls say they are stopped more often by Taliban soldiers and forced to comply with stricter hijab and mahram policies than other women.

The Taliban have no Hazaras in their administration and have fired most Hazaras who worked in the civil service under the former Afghan government. This has caused widespread unemployment and extreme

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/afghanistan-hazara-dread> and <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/afghan-ethnic-groups-brief-investigation> for example.

poverty for many Hazara families. Some Hazara families have fled to Iran and other neighboring countries but others are stuck in Afghanistan because they are turned away when trying to apply for passports at the passport offices.

These widespread violations have led to calls by some Afghan and international human rights advocates to recognize the killing and displacement of Hazaras as a form of genocide. A Twitter campaign called #StopHazaraGenocide was launched on April 21, 2021 and has since been active, having put out over half a million tweets causing the hashtag to trend in Afghanistan.

This campaign was launched again in October 2022 after the attack on the Kaj Education Center and was tweeted more than 17 million times. It became a global campaign with protests held in more than 20 countries including the United States, India, Iran, Indonesia, and Germany where people demanded justice for Hazaras in Afghanistan.

After attacks on Abdul Rahim Shahid High School on April 19, 2022 and in Se Dukan Mosque in Balkh on April 21, 2022, human rights defenders and activists in the Hazara community wrote a [letter as a call to action](#) to all donor countries and international organizations to immediately pay attention to the plight of the Hazaras and take preventive and effective actions for the protection of Hazaras against genocide. They stated that “the attacks on Hazaras represent a pattern in recent years that target Hazara-Shia mosques, schools, education centers, public gatherings, sports clubs, public transports, and even maternity hospitals. In the first six months of 2021 UNAMA recorded 20 deliberate attacks against the Hazara ethnic group, resulting in around 500 civilian casualties.”

In April 2022 a meeting was held with Ms. Rina Amiri, the US Government’s Special Envoy for Afghan Women, Girls and Human Rights, representatives of the Hazara community and a number of families of the victims of the school attack. Another meeting was held with Mr. Richard Bennett, the United Nations Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Afghanistan that same month. However, advocates say the efforts didn’t result in significant and effective action being taken by the UN or the international community to change the situation of the Hazara people.

The World Hazara Council, Assembly of Afghanistan Hazara Social Association, and the Hazara Human Rights Defenders Working group have urged the United Nations, United States of America, and human rights and international aid organizations to focus on the condition of the Hazara people and take immediate actions. Hazara activists have mixed demands about the Taliban. Some said they don’t want the Taliban to be recognized as Afghanistan’s official government. Others have urged the UN and foreign governments to pressure the Taliban, as a defacto government, to provide security from ISIS K and other groups that are targeting the Hazara people, fully respect Hazara religious rights, discourage attacks on Hazara lands by Kuchi nomads, facilitate access to balanced social services and aid to Hazara communities.

The SJSU HRI calls upon the United Nations Human Rights Council to conduct an independent investigation on targeted attacks and massacres against the Hazaras and other ethnic groups in Afghanistan. This requires on the ground investigations and documentation.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Twenty people were interviewed as part of this research, including victims, family members, and school manager from the explosive attack on [Abdul Rahim Shahid High School](#). Interviews also include those with Afghan women's rights activists, anti-Taliban protesters, Afghan civil rights activists, journalists, Hazara human rights defenders, a World Hazara Council key member, a family member impacted by the [attack on the Kaj Education Center](#), and Hazara women attempting to attend university.

The interviewees are residents of Kabul, Daykundi, Bamiyan, Ghazni, Herat, Maidan Wardak, and Sar e Pol provinces. Six people were living outside of Afghanistan (in the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany and Iran) at the time of interview. All the interviewees belong to the Hazara ethnic group in Afghanistan. Some of them spoke to the SJSU HRI on the condition of anonymity because of fear for their safety. We have given some pseudonyms to protect their identities. These in-depth interviews were conducted remotely in the Dari language using secure communications to further protect the anonymity of participants.

These are just some of the attacks that were reported to us. We believe the numbers are higher because many activists and community members said in their interviews that Hazaras don't feel safe reporting violence against them to Taliban authorities or even to the media. The purpose of this report is to document the human rights concerns of Hazara communities in Afghanistan. Incidents and information have been verified to the extent possible under the current conditions in Afghanistan. Those named in the report were given the choice to be quoted anonymously but they chose to be named.

## **BACKGROUND: HAZARA HISTORY OF DISCRIMINATION**

The Hazara people are one of the main ethnic and religious minority groups in Afghanistan. In recent years, there has been no accurate census in Afghanistan. The Afghan government has always cited security problems, long wars and lack of sufficient funds as reasons for not being able to conduct a full census. Persecution of Hazara people dates back to the late 19th century during the notorious reign of King Abdur Rahman Khan. He carried out violent attacks against various communities, mostly those who rose up against him, including Hazaras in Afghanistan. His government engaged in killing, enslaving and displacing thousands of Hazaras from the areas that they had lived in for centuries.

After that, the Hazaras experienced extreme discrimination and inequality until the reign of King Amanullah Khan, Abdur Rahman Khan's grandson, who protected Hazara's rights and made slavery illegal. Hazara people were also the victims of massacres in the first Taliban rule in 1999 and 2001, in Bamiyan, and in 1998 in Mazar-e-Sharif. The 2004 Afghanistan Constitution granted all ethnic groups equal rights, and Hazara people quickly advanced in the fields of education, media, civil service and healthcare. Advocacy groups were formed that defended Hazara communities all over Afghanistan. Despite these advancements during the Afghanistan Islamic Republic 2001-2021, many public places of the Hazaras such as mosques, schools, and clinics were attacked several times, for which ISIS-K claimed

responsibility. Some Hazara advocates and community members said the progress in the Hazara community during the Republic is why the Taliban are engaging in and allowing ISIS-K to carry out violent attacks against them.

A civil rights activist and Hazara rights defender said radical religious groups and ISIS consider Hazaras infidels and that they should be killed because of their religion. Most of the population in Afghanistan are Sunni Muslims. Shia Muslims are minorities and most Hazara people are Shia. “The Taliban also consider the Hazaras deserve harsh treatment because of their religious difference,” said a Hazara rights activist.

### **Perpetrators of Violence**

Responsibility for a number of targeted attacks in public places on Hazaras in Kabul and other provinces has been claimed by the terrorist group ISIS Khorasan branch (ISIS-K). But the violence that took place after the rule of the Taliban is not only related to ISIS. Interviewees, human rights defenders and groups defending the rights of Hazaras said most of the human rights abuses against Hazaras were committed by the Taliban. Other ethnic groups including people in Panjshir province and women protestors have been targeted by Taliban forces as well.

“Dozens of murders, abductions and violence against civilians have been committed by Taliban soldiers. Massacre of people at the beginning of the Taliban's arrival in Malistan district, the arrest and shooting of surrendered soldiers in Daykundi and Ghazni city and other places is an [example of massacres](#) that were directly carried out by Taliban soldiers,” said a civil activist and Hazara rights defender.

### **Targeted Attacks Against Schools in Hazara Communities**

Schools in Hazara communities have been targeted by ISIS-K. Some families have pulled their children out of school because of fears of more attacks. On April 19, 2022 two explosions took place in Abdul Rahim Shahid Center and Mumtaz Training Center in Dasht e Barchi, a predominately Hazara neighborhood in western Kabul. According to the school officials, it resulted in 9 deaths and dozens of wounded.

The first explosion took place in front of the Abdul Rahim Shahid High School at 9:35 AM when 12th grade students were exiting the school. The second explosion occurred minutes later when a second group of students exited the school.

Gholam Haider Hosseini, director of Abdul Rahim Shahid High School said, “Five of our students were lying on top of each other, three of them were martyred there. We brought the injured into the school and closed the gate. We were all shocked . After this incident, the school was closed for 3 days. The teachers and students were afraid. For ten to 12 days, everyone was worried about a repeat of the incident. A number of families did not allow their children, almost 1000 students did not come or went to other schools. We used to have 13,000 students.”

Milad Alizada was a 12th grade student and was preparing for the university entrance exam. He wanted to be a doctor. He studied for 15 days in preparation courses and he lost his life in the explosion at Abdul Rahim Shahid High School attack. Mohammad Hassan is the father of Milad said, “That day around 11:00 AM, I received a call about suicide attack. I called my son, his number was switched off, and I quickly got in the car and went to the hospital. I saw my two brothers in front of Ali Jinnah Hospital. My leg is also disabled, so I rushed down. My brothers told me Milad is injured. I entered the hospital, it was hard because the Taliban didn’t let people enter.”

“My brother didn’t tell me that Milad was martyred. When the car came, I saw my son's body was taken out of the hospital. I fell down. I could not walk. One of his legs was cut off from the top. I have a photo, my son’s body was next to a suicide bomber and bodies of three of his classmates were on each on other.”

The trauma that Milad’s family faced has them fearful for the future. “I am disabled and have to work. We can’t tolerate it. Milad's mother's condition is bad, my daughter is shocked. My two daughters can’t go to school now. I lost my son, at least my daughter should study. I am still afraid, I always check streets, and Hazaras can't go to school, hospital and mosque for fear of explosions and suicide attacks. When my children go to school, I am worried,” said Milad’s father.

Sayed Mohammad Agha’s 52 years old father was killed in Abdul Rahim Shahid School attack. He said, “My father went to help with collecting the bodies of the dead and transferring the injured to cars, but the second explosion happened and he lost his life. They told us that he was injured, so I went to Tank Tel Hospital, and his condition was not good. We took him to Ali Jinnah Hospital, but we lost him there. The Taliban did not allow people to search for their family members.” This family's children went to school 40 days after losing their father. “We are afraid that this will happen again. There is no job, no food, there is no reason to stay in Afghanistan, and we are not living. We are just alive,” said Sayed Mohammad Agha.

On September 3, 2022, there was a deadly explosion at the Kaj education center in Dasht e Barchi. The girls were taking a practice university entrance exam at 7:30 in the morning when the explosion went off. Fifty-four people, at least 51 girls and young women were killed and 114 were injured.

45-year-old Mohammad Zia lost his only daughter in the attack on the Kaj education center. Setara was 19 years old and wanted to become a doctor. After learning about the attack on the Kaj center, he rushed there with his son. The Taliban did not allow him to approach the place and said that if they were looking for a family member, they should go to the nearby hospitals. His son and his brother went to Mohammad Ali Jinnah hospital and he went to other hospitals. He said, “My son called me and we found Setara. I asked if she was alive. He said come here yourself and see her. So I rushed there. I saw the body of Setara there. I could no longer see. I was shocked. I asked my brother to see one more time. Is she really Setara?” While unable to speak, Mohammad Zia said with tears in his eyes, “the journalists were not allowed to interview anyone there. When my wife learned about the loss of her daughter, she passed out and she is still in critical condition. She can't sleep at night and she always says that I lost my only dear daughter. Her brothers are upset. Her little brother, who is 4 years old, said yesterday that he wants to see Setara”. Mohammad Zia is afraid that these attacks will continue and he will lose his other children. “I want my children to study, but I don't allow them to study because this incident might happen again. As hard as losing my daughter, it is hard for our children to remain illiterate, but it should be safe for our

children to go to school,” he added.

According to people interviewed for this report, since August 2021, many educational, cultural and sports centers have been shut down because of insecurity, poverty and Taliban pressure. Nasir Folad, a prominent member of Hazara human rights defenders group said, "Many cultural centers of Hazaras are closed and under security threat, and many of their educated people, professors and researchers are targeted and harassed. I know several educational centers that were closed." He said that Mumtaz Educational Center was closed after a suicide attack on April 19, 2022. The Gam educational center and Kankur Science Center are among the centers that were closed shortly after. These service centers provided the basics of school education and university exam preparation for Hazara youth.

### **Lack of Religious Freedom and Increased Security Threats at Religious Gatherings**

Insecurity and attack on religious gatherings is one of the serious threats against Hazaras. On April 21, an explosion took place in Se Dukan Mosque in Mazar-e-Sharif that targeted Hazara and Shia worshippers. At least 30 died and 50 others were injured. The Islamic State or ISIS claimed this attack.

During the month of Muharram, which fell in August in 2022, Shia and Hazara people held big religious gatherings. A large number of them gathered in mosques or streets and mourned for 10 days each year.

Before the return of the Taliban, the Ghani government used to distribute weapons and security equipment to the Hazara local people under a temporary process to ensure the security of Muharram events and the people themselves took part in providing security. However, in 2022, the Taliban did not implement this program. Taliban even asked the people not to gather in the streets for the Muharram mourning and to hold their events only in mosques and religious houses.

An explosion occurred on Friday August 5th, 2022 near the Imam Baqir Mosque, in the Sar-e-kariz area in the 6th security district of Kabul which is a community with mostly Hazara residents. At the time of the explosion women who were praying were leaving the mosque. Reports indicate that this explosion was caused by explosives embedded in an ice cream cart.

One day later, on August 6th, another blast occurred in Pol-e-Sokhta located in western Kabul. Media reported that 10 people were killed and 40 others were injured during these two blasts. ISIS-K claimed responsibility for these two attacks against the Hazara community in Kabul.

51-year-old Hasibullah is the father of Masih. His two-and-a-half-year-old child was martyred in the attacks on August 5<sup>th</sup> 2022 in Sar-e-Kariz. Stricken with grief he said, “After ten years, we had a child. My wife and son had gone to Sar-e- Kariz. It was the seventh day of Muharram evening, and the explosion took place. When we heard the explosion sound, we went to the place of the explosion immediately, we were not allowed to approach the place of the accident by Taliban, and we searched the hospitals with some of our relatives. My little son Masih was martyred, his body was in Istiqlal hospital

and my wife was in a coma in Aliabad hospital.” These attacks have limited the Hazara community’s ability to gather and practice their religion.

## **THEME 1: DESTRUCTION OF HAZARA HOMES and FORCED DISPLACEMENT**

Throughout history there have been feuds over land between Hazaras and Kuchis in various provinces in Afghanistan. Kuchis are nomads who belong to Pashtun tribes from southern and eastern Afghanistan. They are dependent on animals for their livelihood and their movement depends on weather conditions and the availability of good pasturage. “Prolonged disputes over the land and resources between Hazaras and Kuchis were created because there is a lack of overall policy regarding pasture rights and land tenure. Many Kuchis still hold documents indicating their rights to use pastures and parcels of land (some of which date back a century or more). In recent years there have been increasing conflict between Kuchis and Hazaras over access to land, with periodic clashes between the two groups,” said a Hazara rights activist.

Civil activist Mina Naderi said, “The Taliban destroyed houses of Hazara people because according to them the residential area is not planned. They have not committed such actions in other areas, but the Kabul Municipality destroyed people's houses in the Rig Reshan district on June 18, 2022, Taliban said that these houses are not according to the standard and planned map while there is no planned house anywhere in the city and other areas.

Since the Taliban regained power, Kuchis have become powerful and more hostile towards the local residents. Starting from the beginning of the year 2022, there are [reports](#) that Kuchis entered Hazara living area districts in Maidan Wardak and Bamiyan, Ghazni, Parwan, Ghor, Daikundi and Kabul provinces.

While the problem between Kuchis and local residents in Hazara residence areas is not new, Hazara activists say the Taliban regime has empowered the Kuchi tribes and backs them up when they try to take lands that Hazaras are living on. A civil activist and Hazara rights defender said that nomads are used as a political tool against Hazaras in the spring and summer, and attacks by nomads have occurred widely this year in the Hazaras residential areas. Dozens of Hazara people have been killed and injured due to attacks by nomads in Bamiyan, Daykundi, Ghazni, and Maidan Wardak. In Nahor, Ghazni, four villages have been emptied due to pressure and organized attacks that were supported by the local government and the Taliban. For example, on May 17, 2022, in the Sheikh Ali area of Parwan province, the nomads attacked people's farms with their herds. When they faced the opposition from the Hazaras, 15 people from the nomads shot at them and 9 people were killed and wounded.

“It is a priority to document the crimes committed by the nomads with support of Taliban government officials in Hazara residence areas and to reflect and report them. He said the government should prepare the ground for the permanent settlement of Afghan nomads. He said that the nomads seized and destroyed Hazaras property since the Taliban regained control in August 2021. “Pressure should be put on the

Taliban government to prevent such discriminatory policy and forced displacement of Hazara people,” the activist said.

### **Hazaras Fleeing Afghanistan**

Limited and unbalanced aid distributions in the Hazara living areas increased the level of poverty and hunger among the Hazara communities and a large number of Hazara people have been forced to leave their homeland and immigrate to other countries due to poverty and insecurity.

Shamail Tawana Nasiri, a women rights activist said, “A large number of Hazara immigrated to Iran. I know a family where the father of the family lived with his six daughters. They went to Iran without a passport, but they went through an illegal way which is very risky. Hazaras and especially Hazara activists and Hazara women suffer from ethnic and social discrimination in Afghanistan.

A civil activist from Bamiyan also said, “More than half of the former population of Bamiyan have left Bamiyan. Some have gone to Kabul, Mazar or Herat, some have gone to Iran and Pakistan.”

Nafisa Bahar, a Hazara activist said, “My two brothers left the country 15 days after Taliban control, another family member I know one month after Taliban control decided to leave the country. The future is unknown; we cannot have any plans under the rule of the Taliban. If the situation continues, for the sake of my daughter’s future, I will leave the country even if I have to try illegal and dangerous ways, because under Taliban's rule, as a Hazara, we don’t have any rights.”

### **Hazara Journalist Being Censored and Threatened**

Since the Taliban took control of the country, media and freedom of speech have been curtailed overall and journalists are under threat. The Taliban imposed many limitations on all media and journalists, especially regarding the presence of female journalists on television news. More than 250 media outlets have shut down since August 2021, including dozens run by Hazara journalists and media workers.

According to a Hazara journalist, after the control of the Taliban, most of the media outlets run by Hazaras were closed and a large number of Hazara journalists, including women, left their jobs. Some who continued their activities have also faced violence by the Taliban and their access to information was limited.

“Nine days after the arrival of the Taliban, when people wanted to escape by the airport, I had my press card in my hand looking for a Taliban commander to get permission to interview and take pictures. Suddenly there was a call– ‘arrest them because they secretly took pictures.’ They took me and the cameraman to their commander and beat us on the way. They didn’t let us go. We ensured that we will not make news against the Taliban, we showed them a picture of a Taliban commander who came to our media office and finally they released us,” the Hazara journalist said.

“The Taliban also have an ethnic perspective in their dealings with the media. For example, regarding the issue of the nomads, we asked a Taliban spokesperson for information, but he refused to be interviewed because he supports the nomads against Hazaras.

On September 9, 2021 Etilaatroz Daily Newspaper photographer Nematullah Naqdi and reporter Taqi Daryabi, two Hazara reporters, were arrested by the Taliban during the coverage of the women's demonstration that day. They were detained by the Taliban for several hours and were released after intense violence that left them with injuries. Reports said that were beaten with batons, electrical cables and whips after being detained for several hours by Taliban fighters a day earlier.

Another Hazara journalist said that after the attack on the Abdul Rahim Shahid School in Kabul in April 2022 he went to the scene to report but Taliban soldiers did not give him permission to take pictures and provide reports. He was told that if he remained at the school he would be arrested.

“The people there did not allow us to be arrested. We understood if they arrest us they will torture us and erase the pictures and videos. We escaped from the area quickly. A month ago, we were interviewing people on the road in Pol e Sorkh [Hazara living area] and the Taliban kept us waiting for 40 minutes and didn't allow us to continue our work. They forced us to delete the interview materials, otherwise they would have taken us to the police station,” the journalist said.

These kinds of threats and violence against journalists by the Taliban have forced most journalists in Afghanistan to self censor out of fear of being detained and tortured. A Hazara journalist said “The journalists do not write anything on their personal pages. They cannot publish the required reports. The media don't want to be closed by the Taliban. Censorship exists in a severe manner. There is no freedom of speech. The Taliban have controlled the situation in such a way that no one, not even the media, can publish the truths. If something contrary to their opinion is published, the journalists are arrested and tortured.” Hazara journalists say they are treated more brutally than others.

“If one day the Taliban arrest me, they may not release me because I am a Hazara reporter who prepares human rights reports. Every time I leave my home or work, I have no hope of reaching my destination,” the journalist explained.

People living in Hazara majority areas and provinces said they witnessed restrictions on journalists reporting on life in Hazara communities. According to one civil activist in Bamiyan, “The statistics of self-immolation and suicide have been increased, mysterious deaths are taking place. Four months ago, the body of a 24-year-old girl was found naked in the hills of Bamiyan. It was not clear what happened to her. There is no source or media to report and investigate currently, the media does not have the right to report. Publications are under severe censorship. Reports and programs must be prepared under the supervision and approval of the Taliban. In the case of protester girls arrested in Bamiyan, no one interviews and gives information. This remains a secret, no one dares to talk and object. We do not have access to the protesting girls. We wanted to talk to two families, but they did not talk. They said that just let us live.”

### **Former Afghan Security Forces Pursued and Arrested by Taliban**

People who were members of the military, police and security forces for the Afghan republic are being pursued, killed and tortured by Taliban forces. Those who belong to the Hazara ethnic group said they faced more dangers and risks because of their ethnicity. The Taliban have gone to greater lengths to identify Hazara military personnel and security employees and arrested them. Some of them have been released after being tortured and paid money but many are still missing and their families have no information about their situation.

47-year-old Alia Azizi was a women's prison officer in Herat. She was a Hazara woman and a mother of two boys. When the Taliban took over Herat City on August 13, 2021, Alia dressed as a prisoner and managed to get out of the prison. Mina Naderi who is one of Alia Azizi's aunts and a human rights activist said, "She was at home for a while. She was unemployed and did not feel safe, all prisoners (from the prison she worked in) were released and this was also a threat to her. Ten days before she disappeared, she told me she received a call from the prison officials to return to work. Due to economic problems and fear of the consequences of opposing the Taliban's request, she went back to work."

Azizi only worked for two weeks. On October 2, 2021 she went to work in the morning but never returned home. Her family has not heard from her and despite great efforts, they have not found any information about what happened to her. Her family did not make the issue public because they thought that the woman's disappearance was inappropriate from a social point of view, they only searched for her themselves. Her family went to the Taliban administration, but they were told to wait. After three weeks there was no news.

"We had to make the issue public. The Taliban told our family to keep quiet and not speak in the media and they will follow up. After 4 months of silence, we started advocacy efforts again, but it didn't work, the Taliban had different statements," Mina Naderi said. Alia's family even went to Kabul to search for her. The family paid money to Taliban security officials to find information but their efforts have not produced any results. A year and half later, Azizi's family still doesn't know what happened to her.

On August 30, 2021, Musa Amiri, the former deputy police chief of Khedir district in Daykundi Province, was shot dead by 14 civilians and soldiers after surrendering to a Taliban expedition to the area. A former local commander named Sedaqat had intervened to bring the former Khedir district governor, who had fled the Taliban out of reach and had no opposition to the Taliban, to surrender to the Taliban. The Taliban had promised that if they hand over their weapons, they will continue their normal lives without being harmed. But after they surrendered, all of them, including Sedaqat and a girl, were shot dead by the Taliban.

Hazara human rights defenders said most cases were not reported because the families fear retaliation by the Taliban and prefer to keep the issue secret and not talk about the details of these incidents with the media.

Hanif Rezayi has 8 years of experience working in the National Army and was the spokesperson of the 208 Shahin Army Corps. He spoke about the situation he experienced: "After the Taliban came to the airport, I tried to get out. Hazara soldiers were treated badly. They prevented Hazara people from leaving, but allowed others to leave. After that, I called the American advisers and told them I felt endangered. They told me to go to Pakistan. I tried to prepare some money to go to Pakistan with my family. Hazaras

and Uzbeks were treated badly at the border, for several days they did not allow us to enter Pakistan, finally I was able to cross the border as a patient family member. I stayed in Quetta, Pakistan for 6 days when ISI came to me and arrested me from a photography store.”

Rezayi was under investigation in Pakistan and after 86 days he was released and returned to Kabul. The Taliban didn't recognize him because he didn't have any documents identifying him as a former member of the Afghan military. “After hiding for a while, I went to Bamiyan. The Taliban came to my house twice and asked about me. They searched everywhere. The last time they came to arrest me, I managed to escape and went to Bamiyan and Daykundi, until I obtained a passport and Iran visa and could enter Iran,” he said.

Rezayi spoke about the situation of his military colleagues, “I have reliable information about hundreds of people who were arrested and tortured. Some were released and some are still missing. The situation of Hazara soldiers is tragic, they are hidden, they are unemployed and poor, they are living in fear of being identified and arrested at any moment. They have been forgotten by the international community.”

### **Marginalization of Hazaras from Government Administrative Structures**

The Taliban don't have any Hazaras in their top leadership and have fired most Hazaras who worked in the civil service under the former Afghan government. “No Hazara is present in the leadership and decision-making structure of the Taliban Emirate. There is no Hazara member in the 33-member Taliban cabinet. Among the 99 deputy ministers in the Taliban government, only one Hazara is present at the deputy level and in a ceremonial post,” said a civil activist and Hazara rights defender. There are very few non Pashtuns in the middle to high ranks of the Taliban regime.

“In one case, as many as 160 government jobs of Hazara, who were appointed [before August 2021] through open competition in the civil service process in Kabul, were removed from their duties and replaced by Taliban members. The same strategy has been implemented in the provinces. The Taliban fired the Hazara employees from the national statistics and information authority which distributed electronic ID cards; they dismissed the Hazara judges in Daykundi<sup>2</sup>, and replaced them with their members' Maulvis. They continue the process of removing Hazaras from government offices. Mawlavi Mehdi, who was the only Hazara commander of the Taliban and head of intelligence office in Bamiyan, was dismissed and pressured to completely surrender the weapons and ammunition, but he fled to the north when he realized the situation.”

### **Increasing Poverty and Limited Access to Humanitarian Aid**

Since the Taliban took over Afghanistan in August 2021, an economic crisis emerged in Afghanistan causing severe poverty and food insecurity to spread among the people. Hazara rights defenders said that the poverty is more serious among Hazara people for several reasons. According to a December 2022

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.etilaatroz.com/135556/dismissal-of-judges-of-previous-government/>

report from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Afghanistan faces extremely high-levels of food insecurity, with 20 million people facing acute hunger, including 6 million people at emergency levels.<sup>3</sup> Hazara rights activists say this has had devastating impacts on Hazara communities.

According to interview participants, a large number of Hazaras who were government employees became unemployed, humanitarian aid to the Hazara people was not distributed fairly, Hazara people who live in the remote areas of Bamiyan, Daikundi and other provinces do not have access to work opportunities, and humanitarian aid and a number of Hazara men have migrated abroad. Nafisa Bahar, women rights activist said, “I know families who have no income and are very poor and have not been helped, they don't even have bread to eat. People have really lost hope for the future. We are not alive like humans, we are dead. People are depressed. Currently, the whole goal of people is to save their lives, which is also difficult. Before, maybe one or two beggars would sit in front of the bakery for bread, but now when we go to the bakery, there are ten or 12 people sitting in front of each bakery so that maybe someone will help them with the bread.” According to all interviewees, humanitarian aid was not distributed fairly and the distribution process was not transparent. They said that especially in the Hazara residential areas, aid has not been distributed, or if it has been distributed, most of it has been allocated to Taliban relatives or members.

A women's rights activist in Bamiyan said, “An organization distributed humanitarian aid to more than 2240 families, of which only 200 families were Hazaras and these 200 families were displaced people from Wardak province—not Bamiyan local people. For example, on the day of distribution, they called Fatima, which is a Hazara female name, but a Pashtun man holding a copy of ID received the aid. In general, this aid is distributed to specific individuals and relatives of the Taliban. As a woman who is responsible for my family, I have been unemployed for nearly 11 months, but I have not received any aid. My neighbor is unemployed; her husband is disabled. They eat one time in a day just to stay alive. We were victims of ethnic prejudices. If this situation continues, Hazara people will lose their lives.”

Shamail Tawana Nasiri, a women rights activist said, “In Daykundi province, the Taliban who were from Gizab and other regions brought their families to Nili city and gave aid to their families, they invited their friends from Kandahar and Uruzgan and said come and receive the aid. In the same area, all the hotels in Nili city were full of Taliban, aid had not been distributed to the poor and deserving Hazara people. In Kabul Province, out of 29 times of distributions, aid was distributed in the Barchi side where the Hazara people live just twice and in a limited amount. There was ethnic, linguistic and sectional discrimination in the aid distribution process. Hazaras are not included in donor organizations, and organizations related to Hazaras do not receive contracts. In addition, The Taliban interfered directly in the aid distribution process, and organizations were said they will be allowed to operate if the aid is not distributed according to Taliban requests.”

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[https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/afghanistan-humanitarian-needs-and-planned-response-2023-endarips?fbclid=IwAR1IhB0COELa3mrqHrDED3uKXF16KHXA3X9UP4tq-f\\_cWIvaTS1ixs-EqRY&mibextid=Zxz2cZ](https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/afghanistan-humanitarian-needs-and-planned-response-2023-endarips?fbclid=IwAR1IhB0COELa3mrqHrDED3uKXF16KHXA3X9UP4tq-f_cWIvaTS1ixs-EqRY&mibextid=Zxz2cZ)

### **Restrictions on Obtaining Passports**

The existing discrimination and prejudice against Hazaras has also limited their access to governmental services. Hazara activists said Taliban guards allowed Pashtuns and their family members to enter the passport office in Kabul but not others, especially Hazaras. Nafisa Bahar, women rights activist, wanted to get a passport in case she had to leave the country, “I went to the passport department for ten days in a row, they allowed Pashtuns to enter easily, but they treated the Hazaras badly. They asked, “Why do Hazaras need a passport?”

Some Hazara women even went at night to get in line but they were not allowed. Nafisa added: “ I saw women crying, but the Taliban clearly said, go away Hazara, what do you do with a passport? He took her hand and turned her away. He whipped women with cables, hit them and even slapped women. There, they had a discriminative view of Hazaras and did not treat them like humans. Even on the day when I reached the director's office, he pushed me from the head of the stairs and I clashed with a number of people who were on the stairs. I was really tired and upset because I was insulted and humiliated and didn't get any result either.”

### **THEME 2: REPRESSION OF HAZARA GIRLS AND WOMEN**

The rights of women and girls in Afghanistan have been severely rolled back since the Taliban took over. Women's protests against Taliban policies have led to beating, detention, arrests, rape and killing of women. Hazara women's rights activists report that they have faced harsher reactions and consequences while taking part in protests and resisting Taliban policies.

Civil activists and Hazara women's rights activists ,professors, teachers, and journalists have been threatened, insulted, and otherwise violated during Taliban rule. Nafisa Bahar, a Hazara woman rights activist, spoke about her personal experience. “The arrival of the Taliban was shocking for me, my mental situation was very bad. I joined the group of protesting girls. On January 13 in front of Barchi Center in the west of Kabul, when we went to the protest place, the Taliban were there before us and took our posters and slogans. They arrested and took the journalists from there and treated us violently,” she said.

She said the Taliban soldiers were armed and did not allow them to take pictures. On January 15th, Bahar and others held another protest because of the killing of Zainab Abdullahi and Alia Azizi disappearance. “We faced very difficult moments. The Taliban were following us in several areas, they were running towards us. We left there quickly and took the car....I have a three-and-a-half-year-old daughter. I am worried about my daughter and her future. I had many wishes for her. I wanted to raise a strong daughter, but under the rule of the Taliban, I cannot do anything for her. I wanted to get my master's degree, but I also could not continue my job. We cannot raise our voice or do anything now,” she said.

Shamail Tawana Nasiri is a civil activist and took part in protests against the Taliban. She said that the Taliban called her from different phone numbers to trick her into meeting them. “They introduced themselves as a foreign media journalist, but they did not understand Farsi properly and called me sister.”

Shamail said that she received calls and they told her that we heard that you formed a movement and are holding demonstrations. Give your home address so we can come and get an interview from you or say come where we say for an interview. She had to change her contact number and live in a secret place under a great deal of fear. “When I go out I wear a black hijab which is an Iranian dress and I just keep my eyes open so my face will not be seen to not be identified,” she said.

A women's rights activist and lawyer from Bamiyan reported another incident, “The day of the fall of Bamiyan, We left home and spent some time in Kabul and around Bamiyan. After a few days, I went to my office to pick up the required documents. I took my little son and daughter and wore a long hijab dress. There, three armed people entered and asked what are you doing here? What do you do? I said that I am not here to continue my job, I only collect the necessary documents. They said go and wait for the Taliban order about women's work, I left there with great fear.”

She is still under threat. She said: “I don't see a bright future. Wherever I go, when they see that I am a Hazara, they do not cooperate and even insult me. My concern is to disappear and kill mysteriously like others. I am worried about how my children will live without me.”

### **Enforcement of Mandatory Hijab for School Girls and Women**

Since the beginning of the control of the country, the Taliban announced that women should wear the Islamic hijab according to their criteria. Allowable clothing includes the burqa, (typically a long black dress to cover the woman's body shape) and head/hair covering garments, referred to as hijab. The socially acceptable clothing of women in rural districts and provinces seems to be different from the clothing of women in cities. In Daikundi and Bamiyan provinces, women's clothing has never included a burqa or a long black hijab, they had a local dress and a special clothing culture, but the Taliban have forced women, especially little girls who go to elementary school and study in the fourth and fifth grades, to wear a long black hijab. The Taliban made it mandatory for schoolgirls to wear long black hijab. These girls have to cover themselves from head to foot, they have to walk a long way for two to three hours with these hijabs to reach school. “I heard from these girls that it is very difficult, they get heat stroke and shortness of breath in hot weather. In Daykundi, that type of long black hijab was not found and many families had to come to Kabul and buy the hijab at a high price. They even had to borrow money to buy a hijab and send their daughter to school,” Nasiri said.

Nafisa Bahar a Hazara civil activist said, “I was sitting in front of a local transport car when a Taliban member stopped the car and attacked the driver, saying that you have no right to take girls without a hijab in the car. I said that I am not without a hijab but he said that you Hazaras are irreligious people. When the girls go out, if their hijab is not according to the Taliban's norms, they are called with bad words. They threaten and insult them.”

A young Hazara female student at Kabul University also experienced abuse from Taliban officials because of her clothes and restrictions on studying. She said, “after the arrival of the Taliban, when we were in the dormitory, we had problems from dressing to studying. We had to wear black clothes from head to toe in the summer and in hot weather. In May, two members of the Taliban stood in front of Kabul

University, stopped anyone who was not wearing a black scarf, took the university card and told them to come after class. It was on May 22, 2022 that I encountered such an incident, they took my card for wearing a colored chador and when I went to pick it up, they said that if you wear anything other than a black clothes next time, we will not return your card and you will not be allowed to attend the university class.”

### **Hazara Women Expelled from University**

On December 20, 2022, the Taliban banned all women from attending universities. However, before the ban, Hazara female university students said they were poisoned and attacked. Shortly after the attack on the Kaj Educational Center on October 2, 2022 and a day before the plan for the demonstration by girls of the dormitory of Kabul University, a large number of girls were poisoned after eating the food prepared in the dormitory.

A young woman who is from Ghazni Province and was in the second year of Kabul University is one of the eyewitnesses of this event. “The evening meal was beans. After two hours, the condition of many girls deteriorated. Those who did not eat from it were fine. My two roommates were in a bad condition, we were not allowed to leave the dormitory. Inside the dormitory, there was a small health center that did not have facilities and staff. We went there, the doctor said that we have shot 60 to 70 serums so far, and by 12:00 at night, almost 200 poisoned girls went there,” she said. After publishing news and pictures about the poisoning of girls in Kabul University, the university officials decided to expel some of the girls from the university.

The young Hazara girl student said, “On October 11, when I returned to my room, my roommate said that they informed us that you were expelled from the university and dormitory. We did not know the reason. We went to the dormitory management office to ask the reason. She said that you gave information that you were poisoned and that you were girls who were going to protest.”

Among the more than 60 girls who were expelled, only three girls were Tajik and from Badakhshan province. All the rest were Hazara and some were in their final years of university studies. “All of us participated in the entrance examination after a lot of effort, we studied hard away from our families and now we were fired without reason, we are worried about the future, we have no future,” she added.

According to the information of the interviewees, the university officials asked the girls not to talk to any media about this and not to write anything on social media. She continued, "I am still waiting to be included in the university. We said that you should at least give us a paper or a letter, but they disrespectfully told us that if you are expelled, you can't do anything, just get out of the university."

A 22-year-old woman whose family lives in Daikundi province is also among the expelled students. She reported the same experiences as the previous interviewee. She said, “We are very worried. We heard that two of the girls were arrested by the Taliban from Dasht e Barchi. We are very afraid. We were informed that the Taliban stopped their car, checked their phones and arrested them. We have no information about

their condition. We have no safety, the girls who are in the university also are worried that they will not be expelled for no reason because they are Hazara.”

### **Restrictions on Using Public Places - April 2022**

A number of residents of Hazara communities in western Kabul said that Hazaras experience discrimination and prejudice from the Taliban regime including restrictions in movement and the use of public space.

Hakima Mahdawi is a young lady living in Kabul who had a bad experience going to a restaurant with her classmate and friend. She said, “almost eight months after the arrival of the Taliban, we went there on Thursday. After five minutes five armed Taliban entered the restaurant. There were students and families eating inside the restaurant. I was very scared because I was in the women's movement group and I had photos of the demonstrations on my phone. I tried to hide my phone, but one of them forced me to open my phone. I was hopeless. I thought everything would be over if I was arrested. I unlocked the phone and he checked it. Fortunately, he did not check my photos and WhatsApp. He only checked Facebook and Messenger. Later, men and women were separated, they made the space very dark and turned off the lights. They took photos and videos of the women saying that they came here for illegal relations. They scared the young girls who were there and forced them to confess and said what they asked. If they don't say this, they will take us to the police station and imprison us. I said I came here with a girl and I had no other intention, one of them slapped me on the face and told me to say what we said. I had to do the same. They took videos of forced confessions from everyone. Then whipped the boys and men 20 times each. Two of them held their hands and feet tightly and the third one whipped them and said that you are showing off your sister, mother and family to people. They made everyone assured not to come there again and said that when you go out, don't tell anyone about this incident. At the time of filming, they said that these are corrupt Hazaras and insulted us. I don't know how I got home. This incident has had negative effects on my mind and my life. I have become really disappointed in life.”

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