



## **Lemkin Institute Statement on the Continuous Targeting of the Hazara Community in Afghanistan**

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On September 30, the Kaaj Education Center in Kabul, Afghanistan, was the scene of a heinous suicide attack that cost the lives of more than 35 young girls from the Hazara community. Although this egregious act was claimed neither by the Taliban government nor the Islamic State - Khorasan (IS-K), the return to power of the Taliban in August 2021 has seen a new wave of systematic violence against the Hazara community throughout the entire country. *The Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention condemns in the strongest possible terms the genocidal behavior of the new Taliban regime towards the minority Hazara community and appeals for immediate action on the part of the international community.*

Because of their religious identity, members of the Hazara community have suffered persistent discrimination, marginalization, and deliberate attacks for several decades. As Shia Muslims in a predominantly Sunni country, Hazara have faced long-standing persecution by the successive Afghan political regimes. However, the recent Taliban takeover has worsened their precarious situation; their existence is now threatened by the increased threat of genocide against the Shia minority.

Since the beginning of 2022, several hundred people from the Hazara minority have been killed and many more wounded as a result of targeted attacks, including bombings of schools, places of worship, and other Hazara public gatherings. In these past two years, schools and places of worship were targeted in Kandahar, Kunduz, Mazar-i-Sharif, and Kabul, among others.

The Lemkin Institute warns that the repeated targeting of schools and children strongly suggests the intent to annihilate the Hazara by eliminating the very persons able to ensure the future of the community. By targeting this particular age group, the perpetrators aim to wipe out the lifeline and very foundation of the Hazara community and place the entire group in a highly vulnerable position. The targeting of children is also a particularly harmful form of symbolic violence that aims to humiliate and demoralize the entire community.

The Hazara minority is not solely threatened by direct killings. Another essential element of the attempted elimination of the community is the destruction of its cultural heritage and symbols. In

March 2001, the Taliban's deliberate demolition of the Buddhas of Bamiyan — which, although not built by the Hazara community, had for centuries been central symbols of the community's identity — highlighted the Taliban's anti-Hazara policy; it was followed by a number of similar events, many of which had been outlined by Taliban leader Mullah Mohammed Omar in a private communication to commanders in 2001, in which he called for the destruction of the Hazara's cultural heritage, the prohibition of the Hazara celebration of Persian New Year, the forcible expropriation of Hazara land, and restrictions on Hazara women. One of the most recent attacks on Hazara identity was the beheading of the statue of Abdul Ali Mazari, an anti-Taliban Hazara leader who was subsequently tortured and killed in 2021 by the Taliban. These acts are intended to erase all traces of the community's presence and existence in Afghanistan and constitute a clear pattern of genocide.

Such attacks conducted predominantly by the Taliban will likely increase due to the regime's impunity and the international community's inaction in response to the regime's systematic targeting of the Hazara. For decades now, Taliban have publicly called for the murder and even the complete disappearance of the entire Hazara group. *The Taliban leadership's hateful statements demonstrate the specific intent to destroy the Hazara community.*

Despite the growing threat against the Hazara caused by repeated crimes against humanity and patterns of genocide, the Hazara's plight has not gained international attention. *The Lemkin Institute for Genocide prevention calls for the international community to react immediately and to protect the Hazara by using whatever channels are open to them to communicate to the Taliban that any support for violence against the Hazara will result in strong pushback.*

The UN must marshal international efforts to save the Hazara people by establishing direct diplomatic channels with the Taliban regime to offer a framework for cooperation while warning the regime that as long as the Hazara community, and the Afghan people as a whole, are subjected to such terror and inhumane treatment, the Taliban will remain pariahs in the international arena and no financial assistance will be provided to them. We especially call on Turkey, Russia, China, Oman, and Pakistan to intervene diplomatically on behalf of the Hazara people. Finally, we urge international bodies to prepare to carry out criminal investigations in Afghanistan in order to collect evidence of the atrocities and prosecute the perpetrators.