

26 August 2021



Jubilee Campaign Statement Regarding the Resurgence of Taliban Control in Afghanistan

Jubilee Campaign is shocked and deeply troubled by the unmitigated spread of Taliban control and subsequent fall of Kabul to the militant group. Established in 1991, Jubilee Campaign has witnessed the evolving situation in Afghanistan, from the outset of American armed presence in the nation following the 11 September 2001 Al Qaeda terrorist attack in New York, to the abrupt withdrawal of troops in August 2021. Jubilee Campaign's executive director, attorney Ann Buwalda, also leads law firm Just Law International, and has helped numerous Afghan refugees resettle in the United States over the past two decades. In recent days, we have received numerous heart-wrenching images from our sources on the ground depicting thousands of Afghan refugees wading through sewage water outside of the Hamid Karzai Airport, desperate to flee. We therefore feel the distress of Afghan civilians, empathize with the desperation for security and safety, and share the frustration at the sudden and poorly executed withdrawal of American troops which has left at risk of violent subjugation millions of Afghans, including collaborators with the US, women and children, and ethnic and religious minorities.

Jubilee Campaign, whose primary initiative remains to advance international religious freedom, is concerned for Afghan Christians who have in recent days been receiving menacing phone calls in which "unknown people say 'We are coming for you'", and letters threatening interrogation and prosecution to those who refuse to turn themselves in.¹ With the dark memories of earlier Taliban rule freshly resurfacing – in which Christians were flogged, forcibly amputated, and publicly executed² – many have shuttered themselves inside their homes and disconnected their cellphones in fear of vicious reprisal.³ Despite rumors that the Taliban is showing preference towards implementing a more peaceful and inclusive society than decades prior, as Hedayatullah Haqmal, Dean of Law & Political Science at Kunduz University explains, the Qur'an and Shariah law – which the Taliban pledges utmost allegiance to – are unchangeable texts, and therefore we cannot blindly expect the militant group to enforcing anything other than a stringent and direct application of these religious dictations. By that logic, Christian converts from Islam could potentially be charged with the crime of apostasy and sentenced to death.⁴

Ethnic Hazaras, predominantly Muslim, remember as if it was yesterday the alleged remark by former Taliban commander Maulawai Mohammed Hanif in the 1990s that "Hazaras are not Muslims, you can kill them".⁵ What ensued was the murder of 70 Hazaras in Quzelabad in September 1997 and the execution of 2,000 Hazara civilians

¹ International Christian Concern, "[Christians in Afghanistan Call for Help as New Reports of Persecution Surface](#)", 23 August 2021.

² David Treyster, [The Taliban May No Longer Control Afghanistan, but Their Persecution of Religious Minorities Will Forever Remain a Stain on Global History](#), New York Law School, 2002.

³ Kelsey Zorzi, "[Afghanistan's Christians are turning off phones and going into hiding](#)", *The Hill*, 23 August 2021.

⁴ The Law Library of Congress, [Laws Criminalizing Apostasy in Selected Jurisdictions](#), May 2014.

⁵ Prabhaskar K Dutta, "[Who are Hazara Muslims in Afghanistan and why do they fear Taliban?](#)", *India Today*, 23 August 2021.

in August 1998, during which young boys were shot and girls were kidnapped and raped.⁶ It is reasonable to dread that the vitriolic savagery with which the Taliban attacked Hazaras in the 90s may experience a near-to-full resurgence under militant rule in 2021. In fact, just last month in July in the village of Mundarakht, Taliban forces brutally massacred nine Hazara men, some of whom they tortured by breaking limbs, strangling with scarves, and carving off muscles.⁷

Other religious minority communities, – Sikhs, Baha'is, Zoroastrians, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus – though they have not yet come under Taliban violent threat, have expressed their fear and desire to escape the country. On 15 August, Taliban troops marched through a Shia neighborhood in Kabul and tore down religious signage commemorating prophet Muhammad's grandson Imam Husain.⁸ Two days later, it was reported that no fewer than 120 Sikh and Hindu families have sheltered at Gurdwara Karte Parwan in Kabul, carrying with them holy texts and other religious items; one individual stated “though we are feeling safer here, we cannot say anything as the situation is uncertain.”⁹ And on 22 August, the World Punjabi Organization (WPO) reported that a group of some 72 Afghan Hindus and Sikhs had been stopped by the Taliban while they were boarding a flight to India out of Kabul and were forced to return home.¹⁰

Another extremely vulnerable population is Afghan women who within the past twenty years have made great strides towards gender equality, political participation, as well as employment and education. Now, they face a potential rewind to an era in which they were confined to the home, permitted only to leave with a male guardian, and were prohibited from holding jobs or seeking education. Ordinary women are fearful enough, but female civil society activists and journalists have even more cause for concern: the Taliban allegedly has lists of women in high office positions that they intend to locate and potentially retaliate against. Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Muhahid has repeatedly made commitments to protecting women's rights, but the majority of Afghan women remain skeptical; within the past few weeks, the price of burqas spiked in expectation that women will be purchasing them to comply with Taliban-enforced strict dress code.¹¹

Among all this catastrophe, we also fear for the lives and safety of Afghanistan's children, and we are heartbroken to see videos of parents passing their toddlers and infants to American soldiers in a last effort to save their children via evacuation, despite that there is no guarantee they will reunite in the future. A July 2021 report by the United Nations Secretary-General¹² revealed that 5,770 Afghan children had been killed or maimed between January 2019 and December 2020, and that armed groups including the Taliban are directly responsible for 46% of such deadly incidents; moreover, attacks on schools and hospitals, sexual violence against children, abduction and recruitment of child soldiers, and more make it impossible for children to live their ordinary lives without tremendous terror. On 9 August 2021, UNICEF Afghanistan Representative Hervé Ludovic De Lys lamented the death of 27 children and injury of 136 others within the span of 72 hours due to militant fighting and “indiscriminate attacks on civilians”.¹³

As the 31 August deadline date for the exit of all American troops from Afghanistan swiftly nears, and as reports have detailed that operations are already underway, Jubilee Campaign urges the Biden Administration to remain present in the region until the most vulnerable individuals, especially those listed above – including ethnic and religious minorities, women and children, human rights activists, and more – are securely evacuated or resettled in safe locations throughout the nation. The US military has shown courage, but the presidential administration has

⁶ Human Rights Watch, *Afghanistan: The Massacre in Mazar-I Sharif*, 1 November 1998.

⁷ Amnesty International, [“Afghanistan: Taliban responsible for brutal massacre of Hazara men – new investigation”](#), 19 August 2021.

⁸ Farahnaz Ispahani, [“The imminent danger for Afghanistan's women and minorities”](#), *The Hill*, 17 August 2021.

⁹ Surjit Singh, [“Worried over safety, 120 Sikh, Hindu families huddle up in Kabul gurdwara”](#), *Hindustan Times*, 17 August 2021.

¹⁰ Divya Goyal, [“Taliban stop 72 Afghan Sikhs, Hindus headed to India: You are Afghans, so can't leave”](#), *The Indian Express*, 22 August 2021.

¹¹ NPR, [“Afghan Women On What's At Stake For Women In Afghanistan”](#), 24 August 2021.

¹² UN News, [“Report details grave violations against children in Afghanistan”](#), 16 August 2021.

¹³ UN News, [“‘Shocking’ escalation of grave violations against children in Afghanistan: UNICEF”](#), 9 August 2021.

failed in its policies to support them in their rescue efforts. It is incumbent upon the United States to ensure that the most imperiled groups are given time to be processed and evacuated. No one should be left behind.



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