

Written evidence submitted by Conservative Friends of Hazaras (AFG0039)

Reply to Foreign Affairs Committee Inquiry on UK Policy Towards Afghanistan

What are the humanitarian and human rights implications of the Taliban takeover? How can the UK support those at risk – particularly women and girls – both in the immediate and longer term? What steps is the Government taking to do this?

1. Talibanism

‘Taliban’ literally means ‘religious scholars’ that believe in Wahabism interpretation of Islam, an ideology that started 1400 years ago at the birth of Sunni Islam. The Taliban regime however has been harboured in Pakistan where vulnerable young children are taught religious lessons as a form of education. In mosques across the Afghanistan border, clerics have been inserting their view of Islam on religious students in the forms of ‘shariah’ law (Wahabism understanding Islamic law), a very strict interpretation of Islam, that governed society around 1400 years ago. The only issues are Afghanistan society have set up and endorsed principles and values that are now under threats by the current crisis in Afghanistan.

The Taliban members are predominantly from Pashtun ethnic background and are Sunni-Muslims who reject others. The Taliban regime emerged in 1994 and engaged in committing atrocities across Afghanistan and killing Hazaras based on their ethnicity and believes. For example, the UN Human Rights Watch reported details of the massacre that Taliban committed in 1998 by killing innocent Hazaras in Mazar-I Sharif.¹ Taliban leaders claim that they have changed but the evidence on the ground suggests otherwise.

2. Humanitarian Crisis

Since the Taliban seized Afghanistan in late August 2021, certain ethnic minorities like Hazaras and women have been resisting the Taliban ‘rule’ (culture) that have created challenges for the international community as well as those affected mostly. The attached SOAS ICO policy briefings paper highlights some of these ongoing issues and concerns. A

¹ <https://www.hrw.org/legacy/reports98/afghan/Afrepor0.htm>

colleague highlights some broader humanitarian crisis that the UK government would have legal and moral obligations under international law and principles to hold those responsible. These issues are target killings of Hazara human rights activists; systematic oppressions and discrimination of Hazaras in Afghanistan; torturing and inhumanely treatment of Hazara based on their ethnicity and believe; forced migration of Hazara families from their lands and homes; forced displacements of Hazara communities across the country; and oppression of women and girls so we echo their calls for help.

3. Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office's Role – Evacuation

Home Office published “Afghanistan Citizens Resettlement Scheme” on 13 September 2021² setting out the criteria and the number of people who have been evacuated by the UK government under the ARAP scheme which are welcomed news.

However, there are concerns have been raised by many family members of CfoH and those eligible under these schemes who are being kept hostage in effect by Taliban regime inside Afghanistan without any access to UK Embassy Consulates or leave the country. Eye witnesses confirm that the Taliban members have made it impossible for those Hazaras who are considered high risk of persecution by the Taliban regime to leave the country during the evacuation and reach to Kabul airport between 14th to 31st August 2021. Some Hazara British families are still in Afghanistan awaiting a decision on their request application for assistance.

Eye witnesses have reported that Hazaras were specifically targeted at land borders, especially at Boldak-Chaman crossing. The Taliban in control of airports and borders are making it impossible for Hazaras to evacuate so they are exposed to high risk and at the mercy of the Taliban. Those who managed to leave Afghanistan and reached Pakistan, for example, are being identified and hijacked by unknown officials.

4. The UK's objectives post-Taliban takeover and priorities

² <https://homeofficemedia.blog.gov.uk/2021/09/13/arcs-other-routes/>

The UK government is committed to democratisation, advancement of human rights and strengthening the rule of law that reflect its values and culture. Therefore, we urge the government not to change its course in response to current crisis in Afghanistan. In fact, the UK and its international alliances should focus primarily on the core issue of an ideology that strengthened Taliban, Haqani-Group and ISIS-K. An ideology which requires extensive research and understanding of why and how it continuously legitimising its terrorism activities. A UN official says that “Taliban repeatedly made [false] promises about respecting diversity of Afg[hanistan] & treating members of all ethnicities as equal. The reports of abuses, violence and discrimination against Hazaras in multiple provinces since August 15 is deeply worrying, horrific and unacceptable”.³ This tweet seems to be in response to a deadly attack on Hazara community in Kunduz which happened on Friday 8th October 2021, took 150 lives and injured 200 people.⁴

5. The Taliban and the Hazaras

Hazaras as ethnic minority have been the victims of target killings, genocides and ethnic cleansing for the last few decades by Taliban and other terrorist groups, which are recognised by the UN as such and these atrocities are well documented by the UNAMA. Mullah Abdul Manan Niazi, a former Taliban Commander, released a public announcement that Talibans have been killing Hazaras in a way that “the victims [Hazaras] are not even aware of how they are being targeted.”⁵ There are so many similar direct threats against Hazaras in Afghanistan which are now being executed by extremists.

6. The Afghan citizens resettlement scheme (ACRC)

The UK government ACRC scheme is a welcoming announcement to assist and welcome around 5,000 people in the first year and up to 20,000 over the coming years. The scheme not yet open which seems to emphasis priorities of:

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⁴ <https://www.etalatroz.com/132067/continued-targeted-attack-on-hazaras-in-Afghanistan/>

⁵ <https://youtu.be/VNvALgmkotE>

- ‘those who have assisted the UK efforts in Afghanistan and stood up for values such as democracy, women’s rights, freedom of speech, and rule of law’; and
- ‘vulnerable people, including women and girls at risk, and members of minority groups at risk (including ethnic and religious minorities and LGBT+)’

The ACRS scheme further highlights prioritisation and referral for resettlement will be in one of three ways:

1. ‘Vulnerable and at-risk individuals who arrived in the UK under the evacuation programme will be the first to be resettled under the ACRS. People who were notified by the UK government that they had been called forward or specifically authorised for evacuation, but were not able to board flights, will also be offered a place under the scheme if they subsequently come to the UK.
2. Secondly, the government will work with the UNHCR to identify people most at risk and refer them for resettlement, replicating the approach the UK has taken in response to the conflict in Syria.
3. Finally, the government will work with our international partners in the region to implement a referral process for those inside Afghanistan (where safe passage can be arranged), and for those who have recently fled to countries in the region. This process will likely be affected by the ongoing situation within Afghanistan.’

7. Concerns Raised

The immediate concerns are raised above under Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office’s Role – Evacuation paragraphs which is reiterated here. Other issues seem to be a different understanding and expectations of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) referral programme because the UNHCR have communicated with the refugee Applicants that they do not have a referral program. Can this be clarified and confirmed please?

8. Recommendation

Therefore, CfoH recommends that such set of objectives would set the UK governments foreign policy in the right directions. What constitute the right direction is an objective question which can be quantified by foreign policy holding a government accountable by setting objectives such as how representative a government should be and are universal principles (i.e human rights) adhered by the regime?

In summary, the Taliban regime is associated directly with Haqqani Network and ISIS-K. The Rewards For Justice Program of the United States has been offering 10 million US Dolar for information leading directly to the arrest of Sirajuddin Haqqani who is currently appointed as 'Minister of Interior' by the Taliban regime. Recognition and empowerment of Taliban regimes not only would make our streets less safe but also the regime seems to represent all the values that we as a society reject. Hence, CfoH urges the government not to recognise Taliban. Instead, support the oppositions (i.e resistant coalition of Hazaras) who have been actively campaigning for a democratic society, rule of law, universal values, cooperation between states and governance within a set of devolved powers.

The ACRS scheme should further clarifies 'vulnerable people' and recognise Hazara as a prioritisation criteria.

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