

STATEMENT
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This statement addresses the following issues: (1) repatriation of Refugees, (2) education opportunities (3) rights and security of ethnic minorities.

(i) Repatriation of Refugees

Almost 40 years of war and targeted attacks against ethnic and religious minorities, especially Hazaras, have driven them away, not just from their homeland, but also from their families and friends. Many were internally displaced and a lot more sought refuge in neighboring countries of Iran and Pakistan, but also beyond in EU, Australia, United States and Canada for a safe life.

The agreement signed in 2016 between the Afghan Government and the European Union, makes it possible for EU States to deport asylum seekers back to Afghanistan. They are increasingly seen as economic migrants and the quality of processing the asylum applications in the host countries has decreased since then too.

According to Global Peace Index 2018, Afghanistan is the second least peaceful country in the world¹. Recent security incidents show that none of the regions in Afghanistan is safe enough. Some of deported refugees have been killed and others are facing massive security and psychological problems. They are left alone as soon as they arrive back Afghanistan.

Recommendations:

- Take necessary steps to stop deportation of refugees persecuted for political, ethnic or religious reasons.
- Providing and fairly distributing humanitarian aids to IDPs and Returnees.
- Support already deported refugees with the reintegration processes and provide them with security.

(ii) Education opportunities

Afghanistan has one of the youngest populations in the world and there has been significant improvements in the educational system during the past years. Nevertheless, there are still great number of problems to address. For nearly half of children (estimated 3.7 million) even completing the primary school remains a distant dream. Many girls in rural areas are not allowed to go to school. Early age marriages, insecurity, lack of female teachers and traditional beliefs undermine girls' education. Moreover, insufficient number of schools and education centers in rural areas with hard geographic conditions and even cities where there is no, or little transportation services makes it very difficult for students to access education. They are then in increased danger of exploitation, abuse and recruitment for extremist groups. Child labour makes it even more difficult for many to attend school.

For the few, that make it to schools regularly, the system still lacks resources to offer a quality education. They have to get along with poor school facilities, many students do not have a building to study in, very old curriculum, unqualified teachers, overcrowded classrooms and threat by extremists.

According to the USAID only 300.000 students are currently enrolled in public and private universities². Minorities, especially Hazaras, face harsh discrimination throughout the education system. The Government has adopted a new policy two weeks ago that leads to decrease the number of Hazara minority students in higher education as currently these students achieve the highest grades for entry exams of universities.

Recommendations:

- A strong education system is key to economic growth, democratic development, stability, counter violent extremism and poverty. Therefore, quality education should be **compulsory** and state-supported for children aged between 7 and 16 (until end of middle school).
- "Continue strengthening access to education, in particular, to orphans, children with disabilities and children of missing parents" – South Sudan's recommendation in 2nd Cycle.

¹ <http://visionofhumanity.org/app/uploads/2018/06/Global-Peace-Index-2018-2.pdf>

² <https://www.usaid.gov/afghanistan/education>

- ❑ Work with religious leaders and other groups at the national, provincial and community level to advocate for participating **regular** education, especially for girls.

(iii) Rights and security of ethnic minorities

The issue of ethnic tension between different ethnic groups in Afghanistan has been long discussed; however, discrimination, security threats, and marginalization towards Hazara ethnic group, has been and become a serious concern. Hazaras have been persecuted throughout history. In the late 1900s, more than half of the whole ethnic group was massacred and the rest were sold as slaves³. Since then they have been facing systematic discrimination and continuous targeted violence by extremist groups such as Taliban and ISIS. As a recent example, since early November, the Taliban have launched an all-out assault on three districts in Afghanistan (Jaghuri, Malistan and Khas Uruzgan) that are inhabited by the Hazara ethnic minority. Women and children are among the hundreds dead and thousands driven out of their homes in the dead of winter. The UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs report indicates clear violations of international Humanitarian Law⁴. Taliban killed unarmed, and innocent people, burned and destroyed their houses and mosques, which are civilian objects. Hundreds of families are displaced, yet they have received little to no humanitarian support.

After the collapse of Taliban and since the formation of the new Afghan government in 2001, The Hazaras have embraced democracy, education and women's rights, exemplifying the gains made possible by the blood and treasure that international community invested in Afghanistan. For example, Jaghori, one of the districts under attack of Taliban, which was one of the safest districts well-known for its education and the number of students they send to Higher Education annually, has as many female students as male, according to government figures. The nearby districts of Malistan and Khas Uruzgan, which were also under attack, have similar progress. However, these recent attacks on the peaceful Hazara community also undermine Afghanistan's progress. Security will worsen, and human and democratic gains will suffer.

On the other hand, civil activism, as a newly born phenomenon in the post-conflict space in Afghanistan, particularly those concerned with minority issues has not only been unsuccessful, but also oppressed. Civil protests, voting centers, and even places of public gatherings such as sport and educational centers, mosques and schools are targeted and tens of civilians including women, children and students get killed every other attack. Few months ago, 48 civilians were killed and 67 wounded, most of whom were students, in an ISIS attack on Shiite Hazaras in a tuition center in West Kabul⁵. Just few days before that, in the same part of the city and in a similar ISIS attack on the Hazaras in a voter registration center, 57 Hazara civilians were killed and more wounded.⁶ Thus, systematic discrimination, oppression and marginalization towards Hazara ethnic minority are some of the urgent issues to be taken into consideration talking about minority issues in Afghanistan, yet nevertheless, the Afghan government has unfortunately lacked in protecting ethnic minorities' rights and providing them with urgent security assistance.

Recommendations:

- ❑ Fair representation of ethnic minorities in the government and giving them a voice in decision making processes.
- ❑ Fair distribution of opportunities at all levels.
- ❑ Preventing coordinated terrorist attacks on Hazaras through providing further military assistance (also rural areas).

There are a lot of recommendations dressed up in flowery words. They just need to be implemented!

³ <https://minorityrights.org/minorities/hazaras/>

⁴ https://www.aihrc.org.af/home/press_release/7841

⁵ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-45199904>

⁶ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/04/afghanistan-deaths-attack-id-voter-registration-centre-kabul-180422063114761.html>