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The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[19 August 2022]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only. The views expressed in the present document do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations or its officials.

REQUESTING THAT THE UN TAKE IMMEDIATE ACTION TO STOP THE VIOLENCE AND ATROCITIES BEING COMMITTED AGAINST CHRISTIANS AND OTHER MINORITIES IN AFGHANISTAN

1. INTRODUCTION

It has been one year since the Taliban took over control of the government in Afghanistan.[1] In the wake of its takeover, Christians and other religious and ethnic minorities have been targeted and killed because of their religious beliefs, making Afghanistan the No. 1 country on the 2022 World Watch list for Christian persecution.[2] The Taliban has a documented history of killing anyone who stands in its way.[3] Additionally, the Taliban has carried out “cruel, inhuman and degrading punishments and extrajudicial killings of individuals accused of ‘moral’ crimes”[4]

2. BACKGROUND

Christians and other religious and ethnic minorities in Afghanistan are under threat by two main groups, the Taliban and ISIS. While both are Sunni Islamist groups, their objectives differ and are at odds with one another. However, the one thing they seem to agree on is the death and destruction of the Christian community and other minorities, such as members of the Hazara, Shia, and Sufi communities.[5] In addition to religious minorities, schools and women and girls are also under attack by these groups.

From August 2021 to June 2022, approximately 700 civilians have been killed and 1,406 wounded in Afghanistan.[6] Most of the casualties were caused by the Islamic State Khorasan (ISIS-K) against “ethnic and religious minority communities in places where they go to school, worship and go about their daily lives.”[7]

However, it is not just ISIS-K that threatens the lives of Afghan citizens. Since the Taliban took control of Afghanistan, all minorities have lived in fear that the Taliban will kill them because of their religious beliefs, as the “Taliban continue to persecute religious minorities and punish residents in areas under their control in accordance with their extreme interpretation of Islamic law.”[8] The Taliban have even used direct correspondence and social media to deliver threats of imprisonment and execution to every Christian in Afghanistan saying, “we will find you and we will kill your entire family to bring you the punishment you deserve and to be a lesson for others who are leaving Islam.”[9]

3. VIOLATIONS

Taliban rule threatens the lives of Christians, particularly converts from Islam, as “[i]n the Taliban’s militant interpretation of Islam, Christian converts are considered apostates who deserve death.”[10] As a result, “[t]he Christian community remains underground and hidden from the glare of public scrutiny, operating as a loosely connected network of house churches because Afghan Christians are direct targets for severe persecution.”[11] The Taliban has been utilizing tactics to uncover Christians, such as “confiscating suspected Christians’ phones and looking through messages and contacts.”[12] In fact, the Taliban was “actively tracking down Christians from existing intelligence, even going door-to-door to find them.” As a result, many Christians have “fled to rural regions or refugee camps in neighboring nations.”[13] According to the head of the Afghan House Church Network, the Taliban’s plan is the eventual “elimination of Christianity.”[14] Currently, it is estimated that there are only between 10,000 and 12,000 Christians living in Afghanistan.[15]

In May 2022, ISIS detonated several bombs located on minibuses in Mazar-i-Sharif, killing nine people and injuring fifteen.[16]

That same month, a bomb exploded inside a mosque in Kabul killing approximately five people and injuring twenty-two more.[17] “The blast took place while people were inside the mosque for the evening prayers.”[18] The attack was designed to target members of the Shia community.[19] It is unclear who was responsible for that attack.[20]

On April 29, 2022, there was an explosion at a Sufi mosque in Kabul.[21] Approximately sixty-six people were killed in the blasts and seventy-eight people were injured.[22] The attack came as worshippers were gathered inside.[23] No group claimed responsibility for the attack.[24] In response to this deadly attack, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator in Afghanistan stated:

Today’s blast, which comes on the last Friday of the holy week of Ramadan, is yet another painful blow to the people of Afghanistan who continue to be exposed to unremitting insecurity and violence[.] . . . It is unconscionable for civilians to be targeted indiscriminately as they go about their daily business, gathering for prayers, going to school or the market, or on their way to work.[25]

On April 21, 2022, ISIS-K detonated a bomb at a Shiite mosque in Mazar-i-Sharif, killing at least twelve individuals and injuring thirty-five.[26] The attack came while worshippers were gathered inside for afternoon prayers.[27]

On April 18, 2022, two bombs were detonated outside a public school in Kabul.[28] While no group has claimed responsibility for the attack, it is believed to have been carried out by ISIS-K.[29] Six people were killed and eleven more were injured in the attack:

Many of the victims were teenage boys in the 11th and 12th grades. One of them Reza Alizada, 18, said he was walking out of the front gate with some classmates around 10 a.m. when a blast knocked him flat. Late that evening, he limped painfully out of Jinnah Hospital, with dried blood on his collar and an IV catheter taped to one arm.[30]

The Taliban’s rule has also jeopardized women’s and girl’s rights as “[w]omen have lost what few liberties they enjoyed prior to the takeover.”[31] For example, since the Taliban regained control of Afghanistan, nearly 850,000 girls have been forced to stop attending secondary school.[32] “Christians also fear for the safety of their children, with the Taliban already publicizing plans to ‘eradicate the ignorance of irreligion’ by taking non-Muslim women and girls as sex slaves and forcing boys to serve as soldiers.”[33]

4. REQUEST

These horrific acts of violence violate the peaceful lives of Afghan citizens including Christians and other minorities. The international community must act now to prevent further loss of life and to end the religiously motivated violence. The international community must not turn a blind eye to these atrocities and action must be taken to stop both the Taliban and ISIS-affiliated groups from continuing their rampage of violence and human rights violations. The international community must also work to provide security, shelter, aid, and ensure that the most basic of human rights are secured for these endangered communities.

We have seen in Iraq and Syria what happens when the U.N. fails to take preventative measures when it is clear that mass atrocities are being carried out against a particular group of people. In keeping with the very basic mandates of the U.N. Charter, the world must not allow a full-scale genocide to perpetuate. This is only the beginning. If meaningful action is not taken now, the problem in Afghanistan will only worsen.

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