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To transform underprivileged and minority communities and individuals into informed and vibrant members of society through civic, educational and personal development, by fostering active participation in social and economic activity.

Michelle Bachelet
United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
OHCHR
Palais Wilson
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April 8, 2020

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Re: Sikhs in Afghanistan: Urgent request for humanitarian assistance, protection and relocation

Your Excellency,

We, the undersigned, are seeking your immediate intervention to help Sikh IDPs in Afghanistan who face an imminent death but are unable to highlight their plight at the UNHCR office in Kabul because it is shut due to the Covid -19 health crisis.

Sikhs in Afghanistan are facing a renewed threat to their lives after a terror attack at a Gurdwara (Sikh place of congregational prayer) in Kabul on 25 March 2020, when 25 Sikh men, women and a 4-year-old were brutally killed by four armed men, as 150 Sikhs were attending morning prayers. The Islamic State has claimed responsibility for the attack and the Afghan security forces say they have arrested the mastermind for the attack¹.

¹ <https://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/islamic-state-khorasan-chief-farooqui-who-plotted-kabul-gurdwara-attack-arrested/story-mOuvLV9FNfTwmwPh9yYuEK.html>

At a time when countries have closed their borders and with limited cross-border movements due to Covid 19, hundreds of Sikhs in Afghanistan are ‘trapped’ in their Gurdwaras (Sikh place of congregational prayers) in Kabul, Jalalabad and Ghazni.

We urge the OHCHR to undertake the following:

- 1) Due to the real risk to the lives of Sikhs and Hindus, execute a specific plan administered by United Nations Assistance Mission on Afghanistan (UNAMA) to immediately protect them and their places of worship, homes, schools and workplace from targeted attacks. Many of the attacks have been on Gurdwaras of historic significance. If these historical Gurdwaras are not protected, it will result in the complete ethnic cleansing of the Sikh community that has been in Afghanistan for more than 500 years. The safeguarding and maintenance of these historic shrines after the departure of the community must be in consultation with the Sikh and Hindu communities of Afghanistan.
- 2) Secure the relocation of Sikhs and Hindus in Afghanistan as protected persons in a safe country On humanitarian grounds, administered by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

The Sikh IDPs and Hindus in Afghanistan need immediate protection and relocation to a safer country for the following reasons:

1. During and after the recent Kabul Gurdwara attack the assailants vowed to exterminate Sikhs if they don’t leave Afghanistan.²
2. Three of the attackers escaped despite a heavy presence of Afghan security forces.
3. There were multiple explosions on 26th March 2020 on the route to the crematorium where Sikhs were conducting the funeral rites of their loved ones.
4. On 27th March 2020, explosive mines were found by Afghan Police near the Gurdwara Karte Parvaan in Kabul, which is now the refuge for Sikhs evacuated from the Gurdwara that was attacked.
5. Sikhs in Afghanistan have taken refuge in Gurdwaras since the Afghan Civil War in the 90s. However, the recent attack on the Gurdwara in Kabul has shown that the Gurdwaras are no longer a safe place for Sikhs.
6. The recent attack at the Kabul Gurdwara took place despite assurances from the Afghan Government that safety and security will be provided to Sikhs and Hindus and their temples and Gurdwaras, following a targeted brutal attack in July 2018 when Sikh leaders were killed whilst waiting to meet President in Jalalabad. The recent attack shows that the Afghan Government has failed to provide and cannot provide basic safety and security for the Sikh and Hindu communities and their Gurdwaras and temples in Afghanistan.

Background

The Sikhs and Hindus in Afghanistan are persecuted minorities that have been subjected to ethnic cleansing for many years. In the early 1990s there were more than 200,000 Sikhs and Hindus spread across Afghanistan, but as a result of over 30 years of unabated threats, kidnappings and attacks, the community has been reduced to under 150 families.

² <https://www.sikh24.com/2020/03/28/afghan-sikhs-asked-to-quit-afghanistan-within-10-days-or-get-ready-to-be-killed/#.XoBuYSXTWEc>

UNITED SIKHS is a UN associated international advocacy and humanitarian NGO. In conjunction with CAP Freedom of Conscience, an NGO with a consultative status with ECOSOC and Gurdwara Guru Nanak Darbar of London, UK, which serves the largest Afghan Sikh congregation in the world, we have advocated for the protection and relocation of Sikhs in Afghanistan. In 2018, we highlighted the plight of Afghan Sikh and Hindus at the 39th session of the UN Human Rights Council and at the pre-session of Universal Periodic review (UPR) on Afghanistan, following a dastardly terrorist attack in Jalalabad that killed 12 Sikh leaders and one Hindu.³ The World Sikh Parliament connects and represents the Sikh Nation, its various communities and organizations globally, irrespective of their cultural, linguistic and social background.

Yours truly,



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³ <https://adobe.ly/2yFHhVy>