

November, 2018

His Excellency Mr. Antonio Guterres
United Nations Secretary General
UN Headquarters
405 East 42nd Street
New York, NY 10017
U.S.A.

Subject: Urgent Call to Stop Taliban Atrocities against Hazaras in Afghanistan

Dear Mr. Secretary General,

I am writing to draw your attention to an urgent humanitarian crisis unfolding in my native country, Afghanistan. Since early November, the Taliban have launched an all-out assault on three districts, Jaghori, Malistan, and Uruzgan Khas in Afghanistan inhabited by the Hazara ethnic group. Women and children are among the hundreds of dead victims. Thousands have been displaced since the beginning of the winter, according to the New York Times. They have received little or no humanitarian support. Similar attacks have been reported in other Hazara inhabited districts in the North as well.

I am requesting you to raise your voice in defense of the human rights of people in these peaceful districts by calling for humanitarian and military support for the beleaguered civilians currently under continuous Taliban assault.

If the UN and the international community fail to speak out for the Hazaras now, massacres committed against the Hazaras during Taliban rule in the 1990's will be repeated. These atrocities, which involved the mass killings of thousands of Hazara civilians, are documented by Human Rights Watch and labeled as war crimes motivated by ethnic and religious hatred. The Taliban did it with complete impunity because the crimes were hidden from the eyes of the world.

Currently, civilians fleeing the areas recount experiences tantamount to crimes against humanity, according to media reports. The UN and the international community must act now to urge the Afghan Government to take serious and urgent steps commensurate with the scale of the threat. In your capacity as UN Secretary General, I also request you to urge the coalition forces in Afghanistan to provide greater military support to the local people and local defenders to resist the Taliban's attacks and prevent the worsening of the catastrophe.

We understand that security threats and insurgency are among general concerns for all regions in Afghanistan. However, what makes Hazara people more vulnerable is the fact that the Hazara ethnic group has been historically under deliberate persecution and systemic discrimination for several centuries. The massacres of Hazara people during Taliban rule of the 1990s resembled massacres committed in the late 1870s.

After Taliban regime collapsed, the Hazaras embraced democracy, education and women's rights, exemplifying the gains made possible by the international community's investment of blood and treasure in Afghanistan with a hope that Hazara's would see an end to that historical persecution. For example, Jaghori, one of the districts under attack, has one of the highest rates of educated women and girls in school. The nearby districts of Malistan and Khas Uruzgan, both under attack now, have similar progress. Recent Taliban attacks alongside with continued terrorist attacks during post-Taliban regime, not only jeopardizes all such progress, but also revives the fear that the dark history for Hazaras will recur. Of course, attacks on peaceful Hazara communities also undermine all Afghanistan's progress after Taliban period; security will worsen, democratic gains will be compromised, and people will suffer.

To prevent Afghanistan's backsliding into the dark days of Taliban rule, we ask that adequate military protection be given to the Hazara-inhabited provinces of central Afghanistan. Despite grave threats, the Afghan military does not even have a brigade-level presence in any of the Hazara-majority provinces. A military presence can protect Hazaras against atrocities such as the massacre last August in Mirza Olang village by terrorist groups of Taliban and Islamic State fighters that killed 36 people, according to the UN.

But beyond this, we urge that the international community protect human rights as they engage in peace talks with the Taliban. Afghanistan is tired of war, and nobody wants peace more than the beleaguered Hazaras facing an existential threat. However, I hope you remind the Afghan Government and international community that any settlement that empowers the Taliban at the expense of democracy and human rights will deliver neither peace nor justice.

Sincerely,