

## **Hazara Diaspora Organizations' Statement on the situation in Behsud, Afghanistan**

We the undersigned, Hazara diaspora civil society organizations, express our deep concerns about the tense situation unfolding in the Behsud district of Afghanistan's Maidan-Wardak province. The Afghanistan National Security and Defence Force (ANDSF) have been deployed to launch a military operation against a local resistance force under Commander Abdul Ghani Alipur following the crash of a military helicopter on 17 March 2021, which killed nine army personnel on board. Earlier this year, on 29 January 2021, Afghanistan's Commando Forces (Unit 333) drove Humvees into Hazara civilian protests in the district, killing 11 and wounding 39 civilian protesters. We express our sympathies and condolences to the families of the victims of these tragic events and call for an impartial and thorough investigation of these incidents including the circumstances that led to these preventable tragedies, and demand that those responsible be held accountable.

### **Our Concerns**

The response from Afghan government leadership and its military officials to the tragic incident of the Army helicopter crash has created considerable concerns among the local population in Behsud. On a telephone conference with the families of victims on 20 March, President Ashraf Ghani called for "revenge" for the Afghan army's deaths. Similar statements were made by other security and defense officials, some of which are very concerning. For example, in a social media post, the Commander of the 215 Maiwand Afghan Army Corps ordered the military personnel to "hunt Alipur's group members and their supporters in Kabul, highways, districts, police stations and Behsud like rabid dogs". Such statements are deeply unsettling as they incite violence and promote extrajudicial killing in breach of International Law. With troops' deployment and the retaliatory measures underway in Behsud, we are deeply concerned about the possibility of further intensification of violence resulting in gross human rights abuses in the district. Furthermore, such language on the part of Afghan government officials is likely to incite targeted ethnic violence against Hazara civilians throughout Afghanistan. Prodromes of ethnic violence are already present on social media.

We are worried that if the current tense situation in Behsud is not adequately addressed, the crisis could spark full-scale violence in the district and greater Hazara regions since the conflict in Behsud has deep historical and inter-ethnic dimensions too. The people of Behsud have been facing annual conflict with the Kochi (nomads). Despite the local population and their political representatives' pleas, the government has failed to resolve the land issues between the Kuchi and the local population to prevent disputes. Furthermore, the Taliban's attacks on the Hazara travelers on Jalriz Road connecting Kabul to central Afghanistan have been ongoing for many years and the government has been unable to provide security measures to protect the people. These factors underlie the circumstances in which Alipur's militia forces emerged as a local self-defense mechanism to protect the local population against the Kochi and the Taliban invasions of Hazara villages, as well as to protect travelers on the road.

We are also concerned that the government's response to the conflict in Behsud and its disproportionate retaliatory measures could be politically motivated. We are disheartened that the former police chief of Maidan Wardak Allah Dad Fadaei - responsible for the killings, arbitrary arrests and torture of civilians on 29 January - was recently appointed as the police chief of Laghman province instead of being held accountable for gross violation of human

rights. These violations, which were confirmed by the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) report published on 8 February 2021 is in breach of International Humanitarian Law, in particular the obligation to not attack civilians and civilian objects. The government's decision to appoint Fedaei to another security role has seriously harmed public trust in the rule of law while reaffirming the local concerns and fears that the government's response to the conflict in Behsud is politically motivated.

Given all these concerns, we are worried that the current military retaliation, particularly the use of national security forces for political purposes will result in loss of public confidence in ANDSF and escalation of violence beyond Behsud. This will further jeopardize Afghanistan's stability and security and provide opportunities for spoilers, including regional actors, to exploit the situation for their interests, and undermine a historic opportunity for a peace settlement with the Taliban. To address the existing concerns and risks we are demanding the following:

### **Our demands**

1. We urge the Afghan Government and security forces to:
  1. Resolve the conflict peacefully instead of through military action and retaliation, which could further escalate violence and insecurity in Behsud and its surrounding areas.
  2. Remove Allah Dad Fadaei from his role as the Police Chief of Laghman and refer his case to the judiciary for an independent investigation.
  
2. We demand that:
  1. The international community and the states engaged in Afghanistan put pressure on the Afghan Government to avoid escalation of violence and reach a peaceful resolution to the Behsud tensions.
  2. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) office conduct independent investigations into the alleged human rights violations committed in Behsud.
  3. States engaged in Afghanistan and the United Nations conduct an impartial investigation into the crash of the ANDSF helicopter on 17 March, including providing technical expertise and intelligence to identify the source of the potential attack and perpetrators.
  
3. We urge the AIHRC and Amnesty International to:
  1. Closely monitor the ongoing developments in Behsud and provide independent and impartial reporting to counter misinformation.
  2. Conduct its own investigations into human rights violations, including the killing of civilians and members of the ANDSF.

**Submission by:**

Hazara International, Australian Hazara Women's Friendship Network, Hazara Council of Great Britain, World Hazara Council, Canadian-Hazara Humanitarian Services in Canada, Salsal Association in Sweden, The Hazara Research Collective, Hazara Kulturverein Hamburg, Katib Cultural Association in Denmark, World Ismaili Hazara Network in Canada, and Baba Mazari Foundation in Australia. Hazara Association of New Zealand



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