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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by Himalayan Research and Cultural Foundation, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

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

[3 February 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.



Human Security in Afghanistan

The swift takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban in mid-August 2021 due to the United States of America hurried exit from there after 20 years, once again brought the region into the focus of international attention. The United States of America military packed out of the country after being there for 20 years, leaving Afghanistan in shambles. The United States of America disorganized withdrawal of its forces leaving behind billions of dollars worth equipment, fighter jets, helicopters, armored cars, sophisticated arms and ammunition in the hands of the Taliban fighters, has boosted the terror infrastructure and capacity of the terrorists to wreck havoc in South and Central Asia and even beyond. The United States of America exit has pushed Afghanistan into a worse situation of depletion of morale and destruction. Hundreds of thousands of Afghans have been desperately trying to flee their homeland, for safety to other countries. We have seen chilling images of stampedes at Kabul airport, including of people running alongside the United States of America Air force plane. On 16th September 2021, everybody watched with dismay the horrible scenes of thousands of Afghans jostling for some space at the Kabul international airport to flee their motherland due to fear of death and destruction. So much so, two Afghan civilians who clung to the departing aircraft fell down to death from the flying aircraft. Tens of thousands including those Afghans and their families, who had assisted the American troops for two decades in various capacities, are fearing for their lives. They have been desperately seeking safe refuge out into other countries for safety. The image of two Afghans clinging to the flying aircraft in their desperation to flee Afghanistan and plummeting to death from the sky, is a true horror story too difficult to be described in words. Over 170 Afghans and 13 United States of America soldiers were killed in a suicide bomb blast claimed to have been executed by the Islamic State of Khorasan at Kabul airport, points to the dangerous situation in Afghanistan.

The past few months' experience shows that the new Taliban regime (having many ministers who were sanctioned by the United Nations for their terrorist activities) is unrelenting in the implementation of its obscurantist and extremist Islamist agenda. The new regime is all male and Pashtun dominated by Kandhar based Taliban group and the leaders of the Haqqani network terrorist outfit. Many of them are on the United Nations sanctioned terror list, and some are former inmates of the Guantanamo Bay centre. The Taliban group based in Doha, which had negotiated with the United States of America, has been largely sidelined. Journalists, musicians, artists, rights activists, women, writers, civil society have been brutally mauled. According to a survey conducted by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) and Afghan Independent Journalists Association (AIJA) on the plight of Afghan journalists, since August 2021, 84% of women journalists and media workers have become unemployed due to restrictions due to economic woes and restrictions imposed by the new Taliban regime on freedom of expression, human rights and civil liberties. "A total of 231 media outlets have been closed and more than 6,400 journalists have lost their jobs since August 15, 2021. Women journalists have been hit the hardest", according to the survey. It further revealed that "of the 543 media outlets operating at the start of summer 2021, only 312 were still operating at the end of November 2021". Two reporters Zaki Daryabi and Nematullah Naqdi, working for daily newspaper Etilaatroz were detained and beaten up by the Taliban in early September 2021 for their coverage of ongoing protests in Kabul. (1). Popular Afghan musicians and artistes have been forced to flee into hiding leading to closure of music programmes. While some artistes including a comedian were brutally killed, the national music institute was raided and instruments broken up by the Taliban fighters. Curbs on women's education including compulsory dress code, hijab, gender segregation etc. have been enforced. Thousands of Afghan men and women, young and old took out a demonstration in Kandhar on 14 September 2021 against the new Taliban rulings. Earlier women demonstrators in Kabul were thrashed and dispersed under the force of the gun. The Taliban have carried out reprisal killings of Afghan air force pilots and one woman pilot was stoned to death in public. There have been targeted killings of Hazara minority members, journalists, security force members and those Afghans who worked in various capacities with the United States of America forces during the past 20 years. Taliban fighters killed 9 ethnic Hazara men after taking control of Ghazni province in July 2021. They killed 13 Hazaras including a 17-year old girl in Daykundi province on 30 August 2021. On 8 October 2021, at least 1900 Shias were killed or injured, after a suicide bomber targeted a Shia mosque

during Friday prayers in Kunduz. Islamic State Khurasan Province (ISKP) claimed responsibility for this attack. One Hindu Afghan trader was kidnapped on 14 September 2021 for extracting ransom.

In November 2021, the Ministry for Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice issued new 'religious guidelines' barring TV shows with women actors and ordering women journalists and presenters to wear Islamic hijab on the screen. Ministry of Women's Affairs has been shut down, and its office building has been occupied by the infamous Ministry for Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice. The media has been directed not to publish any matter in conflict with Islam and to produce news reports in coordination with the government media office.

Afghanistan produces 90 per cent of the world's illicit opium. In 2020 opium poppy was grown on some 2,24,000 hectares, one of the highest levels of cultivation in the country. In 1996, the Taliban began taxing farmers and traffickers and protecting the latter. Production of opium, 200 tones in 1980, rose to 1,600 tones in 1990 and 3,400 in 1994. It almost doubled from 2,248 tones in 1996 to 4,565 tones in 1999. In 2008, Taliban had collected 50 million US dollars as Ushr and 125 million US dollars by taxing laboratories producing opium and morphin base. According to Gretehen Peters, "The Taliban rakes in as much as 250 million US dollars every year providing armed protection for drug shipments moving through their control zones. They also receive tens of millions of dollars worth of material supplies including vehicles, food and satellite phones". As per UN officials, the Taliban are likely to have earned more than 400 million US dollars between 2018 and 2019 from the drug trade. A May 2021 SIGAR report quoted a United States of America official estimating that the Taliban derive upto 60 per cent of their annual revenue from illicit narcotics.

Whereas northern Panjshir province is still out of Taliban's full control, establishment of democracy, rule of law and justice, human rights of ethnic-religious minorities, women, children and the people at large across Afghanistan, remains a distant dream. The future of a peaceful and secure Afghanistan, which guarantees the well-being of all its people irrespective of their ethnic-religious or gender background, hinges upon the success of reconciliation between various ethnic and regional Afghan groups and also the emergence of a balanced, broad-based and inclusive government representing diverse ethnic, religious, minority groups and women. The world has been watching helplessly the horrendous situation of the people there. While this issue has assumed serious proportions, the international community needs to ponder over the actual causes that triggered the current disastrous situation endangering peace and security in both Afghanistan, neighbouring countries and the world at large. An objective introspection of the manner in which the United States of America and extra-regional powers have handled the situation, is required. Besides, the immediate humanitarian concerns of the Afghan people need immediate attention and relief.

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1. See 153 Af media outlets stop op after Taliban recapture. Pioneer 15 September 2021. pp1-2