



**Afghanistan - Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 7 December 2010**

**Treatment of Hazara by government forces, November 2009 - November 2010.**

A report by the *United States Department of State* under the heading 'Religious Demography' states:

"Historically members of the same religious groups have concentrated in certain regions. Sunni Muslim Pashtuns dominate the south and east. The homeland of the Shi'a Hazaras is in the Hazarajat, the mountainous central highland provinces around Bamyan province. Northeastern provinces traditionally have Ismaili populations. Other areas, including Kabul, are more heterogeneous and include Sunni, Shi'a, Sikh, Hindu, and Baha'i populations. The northern city of Mazar-e Sharif includes a mix of Sunnis (including ethnic Pashtuns, Turkmen, Uzbeks, and Tajiks) and Shi'a (Hazaras and Qizilbash), including Shi'a Ismailis." (United States Department of State (17 November 2010) *International Religious Freedom Report 2010 –Afghanistan*)

In a section titled 'Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom' the same report continues:

"Most Shi'a were members of the Hazara ethnic group, which was traditionally segregated from the rest of society for a combination of political, ethnic, and religious factors, some of which resulted in conflicts. The Hazaras accused the government of providing preferential treatment to Pashtuns and of ignoring minorities, especially Hazaras. The government made significant efforts to address historical tensions affecting the Hazara community. Although there were reported incidents of unofficial discrimination, and treatment varied by locality, Shi'a generally were free to participate fully in public life." (ibid)

Another report by the *United States Department of State* under the heading 'Societal Abuses and Discrimination' notes:

"Social discrimination against Shia Hazaras continued along class, race, and religious lines. Ethnic Hazaras reported occasionally being asked to pay additional bribes at border crossings where Pashtuns were allowed to pass freely." (United States Department of State (11 March 2010) *2009 Human Rights Report: Afghanistan*)

In a section titled 'National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities' this same report adds:

"Ethnic minorities continued to face oppression, including economic oppression. Dasht-i Barchi, one of Kabul's poorest neighborhoods, was home to a large Hazara population. Average earnings per day were 13 Afghanis (25 cents) per person, although the minimum wage was 63 Afghanis (\$1.25) per

day; average household size was nine to 10 persons. In Dasht-i Barchi, 60 percent of all families rented their homes and were therefore subject to landlord exploitation; 50 percent of families' income went to cover rent, and families moved frequently." (ibid)

A report by the *United States Congressional Research Service* under the heading 'Religious Freedom' states:

"A positive development is that Afghanistan's Shiite minority, mostly from the Hazara tribes of central Afghanistan (Bamiyan and Dai Kundi provinces) can celebrate their holidays openly, a development unknown before the fall of the Taliban. Some Afghan Shiites follow Iran's clerical leaders politically, but Afghan Shiites tend to be less religious and more socially open than their co-religionists in Iran. The Hazaras are also advancing themselves socially and politically through education in such fields as information technology. The former Minister of Justice, Sarwar Danesh, is a Hazara Shiite, the first of that community to hold that post. He studied in Qom, Iran, a center of Shiite theology. (Danesh was voted down by the parliament for reappointment on January 2, 2010, and again on June 28 when nominated for Minister of Higher Education.)..."(United States Congressional Research Service (13 October 2010) *Afghanistan: Politics, Elections, and Government Performance* –pg 25)

A report by the *UNHCR* under the heading 'Minority ethnic groups' notes

"Social discrimination against the Hazaras continues to be reported, including being asked to pay bribes at border crossings where Pashtuns were allowed to pass freely. Despite significant efforts by the Government to address historical tensions affecting the Hazara community, including preferential employment, some Hazaras community leaders accused President Karzai of providing preferential treatment to Pashtuns to the detriment of other minorities, particularly the Hazaras. Furthermore, the rising power of warlords is also a concern for the Hazaras as they may pose a direct threat to the Hazara community given the absence of State presence and rule of law in many areas. Despite constitutional guarantees of "equality among all ethnic groups and tribes" and Government's attempts to address the problems faced by ethnic minorities, discrimination and ethnic clashes, particularly in relation to land ownership disputes, still occur. Severe discrimination against ethnic minorities in some areas is also reported, most commonly in the form of denial of access to education and other services and political representation. As such, members of ethnic groups may be at risk of persecution on the ground of their ethnicity/race, in areas where they constitute a minority. In this respect, the fear of being persecuted need not always extend to the whole territory of Afghanistan." (UNHCR (July 2009) *UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan* - pg 19)

A report by *Freedom House* under the heading 'Political Rights and Civil Liberties' states:

"Religious freedom has improved since the fall of the ultraconservative Taliban government in late 2001, but it is still hampered by violence and harassment aimed at religious minorities and reformist Muslims. The constitution establishes Islam as the official religion. Blasphemy and apostasy

by Muslims are considered capital crimes. While faiths other than Islam are permitted, non-Muslim proselytizing is strongly discouraged. A 2007 court ruling found the minority Baha'i faith to be a form of blasphemy, jeopardizing the legal status of that community. Hindus, Sikhs, and Shiite Muslims—particularly those from the Hazara ethnic group—have also faced official obstacles and discrimination by the Sunni Muslim majority. Militant groups have occasionally targeted mosques and clerics as part of the larger civil conflict.” (Freedom House (3 May 2010) *Freedom in the World - Afghanistan (2010)*)

#### **References:**

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This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

**Sources Consulted:**

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