



Afghanistan – Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 11 May 2012

Information on whether persons who worked in a civilian capacity for American companies were targeted in Afghanistan by the Taliban. Information on whether death threats / warning letters were issued by the Taliban, otherwise "Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Ministry of Intelligence, Directorate of Administration". Are these death threats from the Taliban considered credible by the Afghan authorities and non-governmental agencies? Have American companies or the Afghan authorities provided any form of significant protection to Afghan workers and their families?

An *International Crisis Group* report, in a section titled "Executive Summary and Recommendations", states:

"A website in the name of the former regime – the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan – is used as an international distribution centre for leadership statements and inflated tales of battlefield exploits. While fairly rudimentary, this is not a small effort; updates appear several times a day in five languages. Magazines put out by the movement or its supporters provide a further source of information on leadership structures and issues considered to be of importance. But for the largely rural and illiterate population, great efforts are also put into conveying preaching and battle reports via DVDs, audio cassettes, shabnamah (night letters – pamphlets or leaflets usually containing threats) and traditional nationalist songs and poems. The Taliban also increasingly uses mobile phones to spread its message." (International Crisis Group (24 July 2008) *Taliban Propaganda: Winning the War of Words?*)

In a section titled "Spreading The Message", (paragraph headed "Night letters (Shabnamah)"), this report states:

"Night letters (shabnamah) are a traditional means of communication in Afghanistan. Printed or handwritten pages are delivered to individuals, distributed through towns and villages or even blanketed over provinces. It is difficult to establish the true source of night letters, since messages are sent by a large variety of sources. Criminal groups, including those involved in the drugs trade, could, for example, conceivably use night letters in the name of the Taliban to generate fear in an area. The Taliban uses them often to deliver threats, generally directed at Afghans who work with the international forces or the government." (ibid, p.12)

An English language translation of a "night letter" allegedly issued by the *Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan* (Taliban) and published on the Combating Terrorism Center website states:

"Any kinds of work such as construction, engineering or road work are prohibited. You are even prohibited from leasing your tractor or car to the government. If we capture any government employee, we will punish him severely. Helping the foreign companies or getting help from them is absolutely prohibited." (Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (9 May 2009) *Taliban night letter for the people of Paktika Province*)

An *Institute for War & Peace Reporting* article on the intimidation of civilians by the Taliban states:

“Wardak, where once people never thought to fasten their gate latches in the evening, is now a province of fear. ‘I saw them one night, tacking a ‘night letter’ to the wall of our mosque,” said Matiullah, 28, of Sayed Abad district, in southern Wardak province. I saw their guns, and I was afraid to even speak to them.’ The next morning, said Matiullah, he went to read the night letter - normally a note or poster the Taleban pin to trees, mosques or schools warning locals not cooperate with the authorities, international forces or overseas aid groups. ‘It was written that those who work with the government or foreign NGOs will face a harsh death,’ he said. ‘And it called for people to start jihad against the Americans and the government, and to help the Taleban.’” (Institute for War & Peace Reporting (25 July 2007) *The Night Belongs to the Taleban*)

A *Human Rights Watch* report on the intimidation of women by the Taliban, in a section headed “Night Letters” states:

“A common means of intimidation and control of local communities by insurgents is the use of night letters—threatening letters usually hand-delivered or posted to a door or mosque by insurgent groups, often at night. Nadia N., who worked for an international NGO in a southern province, received the following night letter soon after the killing of Hossai:

We would warn you today on behalf of the Servants of Islam to stop working with infidels. We always know when you are working. If you continue, you will be considered an enemy of Islam and will be killed. In the same way that yesterday we have killed Hossai, whose name was on our list, your name and other women’s names are also our list.

Nadia N. told Human Rights Watch that she believed that she was targeted because she was working ‘outside the home.’ She informed the local security services, but said she expected no protection. She resigned from her job, and has moved to another province.” (Human Rights Watch (13 July 2010) *The “Ten-Dollar Talib” and Women’s Rights: Afghan Women and the Risks of Reintegration and Reconciliation*, p.25)

An article published by *The Canadian Press* states:

“An unexpected knock, a threatening late-night phone call, a so-called ‘night letter’ nailed to the front door _ such intimidation tactics are a chilling fact of life for locals who work as translators for the Canadian Forces or federal agencies on the ground in Afghanistan. It’s hardly surprising, then, that many are overjoyed at the news that Ottawa will be fast-tracking permanent trips to Canada for those locals who face what Immigration Minister Jason Kenney described as ‘extraordinary personal risk’ as a result of their work. The program, which is scheduled to get underway next month, will ensure interpreters who have worked with Canada’s military or civilian agencies get special consideration if they express a desire to emigrate to Canada. For many, such a move is considered a matter of life and death. ‘When I am at home, I can’t sleep very well. Our home is actually in a safe area, but I’m scared a lot,’ said one interpreter, a medical student in Kandahar city who has worked for the Canadians at Kandahar Airfield (KAF) for nearly four years. The interpreter spoke only on condition of anonymity, for fear of Taliban reprisals _ an ever-present danger for any local Afghans who are perceived to be providing support to NATO forces in Afghanistan.”

(The Canadian Press (21 September 2009) *Canada's fast-track immigration plan gives high hopes to Afghan interpreters*)

An article published by *The Globe and Mail* states:

“On Sunday morning, residents awoke to discover their streets scattered with ‘night letters.’ The warnings, written on plain white paper, urged local residents to take cover and foreigners to flee. UN workers and Afghan residents feared they would become the latest victims of Taliban violence, which is gaining momentum in the runup to a massive NATO military operation that is considered the make or break battle of an eight-year war. So on Sunday afternoon, everyone in Shar-i-nau did as they were told. Some UN foreign staff sought overnight shelter at Camp Nathan Smith, the provincial reconstruction team's inner-city headquarters, before being evacuated to Kabul the next day. Two hundred Afghan staff working for the organization in Kandahar were ordered to stay home. Terrified local residents cowered in their houses, bracing for what might happen next. The explosions struck within a minute of each other, killing two people around 7:30 a.m. yesterday.” (The *Globe and Mail* (Canada) (27 April 2010) *UN Pulls Foreign Staff as Kandahar Becomes a City Under Siege*)

A UN Human Rights Council report, in a section titled “Taliban assassinations and ‘night letters’” (paragraph 27), states:

“The Taliban routinely resorts to assassinations to coerce and punish civilians. In 2008, 271 such executions were committed. These killings are the tip of an iceberg of intimidation, epitomized by the ‘night letters’ distributed to civilians. Some letters are displayed in public places - nailed to a mosque door, a school, or in a public market - and contain general directives or threats to the local population.” (UN Human Rights Council (6 May 2009) *Report of the Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions, Philip Alston : addendum : mission to Afghanistan*, p.15)

In Footnote 27 of this report Special Rapporteur Philip Alston states:

“In addition to the accounts that I received from witnesses, I reviewed a large number of night letters and other information gathered in Afghanistan. Threats made by the Taliban in person, by telephone, and through night letters and other publications have attempted to induce compliance with social norms favored by the Taliban and to deter various forms of collaboration with the Government, the international forces, and other actors. Persons threatened and targeted have included mullahs in Ulema Councils that advise the Government, members of Provincial Councils (especially female members), teachers, students attending school (especially female students), elders perceived to be collaborating with the Government, drivers supplying food to the international forces, persons employed by the Government, and persons working for non-governmental organizations.” (ibid, pp.15-16)

See also Footnote 28 where the Special Rapporteur states:

“The East and the South see different patterns of abuse by the Taliban. In the East, night letters tend to be fairly general admonitions not to cooperate with foreigners; whereas, in the South, night letters tend to be more specific warnings that particular individuals must desist from particular activities. And, in the East, individuals labeled as collaborators are more likely to receive multiple warnings and even to be released after being detained by the Taliban, while, in the South, such individuals are more likely to be beheaded.” (ibid, p.16)

The introduction to an *Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission* report, in a section titled “A Campaign of Intimidation and Murder”, states:

“In an attempt to weaken the Afghan government, insurgents in Afghanistan are systematically terrorizing the civilian population with ‘night letters,’ kidnappings, executions (often by beheading) and other crimes. Their targets include doctors, teachers, students, government aligned elders, Ulema Council members, civilian government employees, suppliers and day laborers of public-interest reconstruction work and military bases, as well as former police and military personnel. Others, such as unassociated relatives of civil servants, have also been targeted. In an attempt to further weaken public support for the government, insurgents have also begun violent campaigns of intimidation against schools, medical services, humanitarian aid and commercial supply lines.” (Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) (December 2008) *Insurgent Abuses against Afghan Civilians*, p.4)

This section of the report also states:

“In a country suffering from high levels of poverty and unemployment, threats and murders of people labeled by insurgents as ‘collaborators’ and ‘spies’ is striking such fear into people that they abandon their jobs and sometimes leave their homes. In one story heard by AIHRC, insurgents executed eight day laborers who were traveling home for Eid after completing their work at an American base. It is often the poorest people of Afghanistan who are being threatened, kidnapped, and executed because they work on government or international construction or development projects.” (ibid, p.5)

A *UN Human Rights Council* report, in a section titled “Anti-Government elements” (paragraph 11), states:

“This campaign included assassinations, executions, abductions, night letters and threats. In one week alone in August, in Kandahar province, AGEs allegedly assassinated a former prosecutor, a sitting judge, a shura member, an off-duty Afghan National Police officer, a woman working for an international non-governmental organization (NGO) and an engineer working for an international company. Civilians targeted included teachers, nurses, doctors, tribal elders, community leaders, provincial and district officials, other civilians and civilians working for international military forces and international organizations. The intensified pattern of assassinations reinforced the widespread perception by civilians that the Taliban can strike anywhere at anytime with impunity and that the Government and international forces are failing to protect them.” (UN Human Rights Council (19 January 2011) *Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan and on the achievements of technical assistance in the field of human rights*, p.5)

A report jointly published by the *United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan* and the *UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights*, in a section titled “Anti-Government Elements and Protection of Civilians”, states:

“In addition to targeted killings, Anti-Government Elements intensified their campaign of intimidation through erection of illegal road blocks, disruption of mobile telephone networks, delivery of threatening ‘night letters’ and public threats to civilians working for or viewed as supportive of the Government or international military forces, organizations and companies. In some cases these threats caused individuals to

leave their homes and jobs.” (United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan & UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (February 2012) *Afghanistan – Annual Report 2011: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict*)

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research and Information Unit 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.

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