

**Violence and Threat  
against  
Sufis and Sikh in Afghanistan**



Afghanistan Human Rights Center

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## **Introduction**

In November, villagers found 11 people massacred in a Sufi Shrine in Sayed Pasha Agha Shrine in Nahrin District of Baghlan province by unknown gunmen. Our colleagues from the region described the scene a slaughter of human beings in their first report. This atrocity is part of a relatively new violent trend that has destabilized the core of Afghanistan long term religious coexistence and exhibit a dark wave of hatred imported from other part of the world and from Afghanistan neighbor country, the Pakistan into Afghanistan. The past 40 years of conflict and its destructive impact compounded with social, political and cultural change, and a promotion of concept of Jihad and madrassas that were funded by people and entities from wealthy Persian Gulf countries and other donors without proper oversight and monitoring, have created an environment of intolerance and radicalism that does not leave any social, gender, religious and ethnic groups unharmed and destabilize the country.

This report provides an account of violence and attacks against Sufis and Sikhs minorities who have been repeatedly attacked, harassed and persecuted. The report describes deteriorating human rights situation of religious minorities and sects under the Taliban and because of the raise of the Taliban as violent religious group. The focus the report brings for the world community to pay attention to the ongoing atrocities against religious minorities and its implication on human rights of Afghanistan population is important. The report will provide some recommendations to the audience both within Afghanistan and the international community.

## **Background**

Discrimination and oppression against religious minorities, both Muslim and non-Muslim, have a long history. According to research by the Afghanistan Human Rights Center, since the Taliban seized power in August 2021, religious freedoms have been severely restricted, and the situation of religious minorities, including Shiite Hazara, Sufis, Ahmadiyya, Bahá'ís, Hindus, Salafies and Sikhs, has worsened. These religious minorities are unable to freely conduct their religious ceremonies. In addition, religious minorities are subjected to harassment and are being killed.

According to the annual report on the status of religious freedom by the U.S. Department of State's International Religious Freedom Commission, the U.S. Department of State re-designated the Taliban as an "entity of particular concern" or EPC, under the International Religious Freedom Act for engaging sever violations of religious freedom<sup>1</sup>. According to this report, Christians, Ahmadiyya, Bahá'ís, Hindus, and Sikhs had further withdrawn from participation in public activities, with most in remaining in hiding or opting to leave the country<sup>2</sup>.

Religious minorities, including followers of Sufism (Tasawwuf) and Sikh, are subjected to targeted attacks. According to the Afghanistan Human Rights Center's research, members of

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of State, 2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Afghanistan, 3

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

the Sufi and Sikh communities are often targeted during their religious ceremonies at places of worship. Suffi leaders also have been arrested, undignified in public and beaten up.

The attacks against Sufis and Sikhs civilians in Afghanistan have been deliberate and targeted. These attacks appear to be motivated solely by religious beliefs. Religious extremist groups have ideological disagreements with Sufis and Sikhs. After several attacks on Sufis, the Islamic State Khurasan Province (ISKP) issued statements claiming responsibility for the attacks and labeling Sufis as infidels.

### **Harassment of Religious Minorities**

Different Sufi sects face harassment. The harassment of Sufis occurs because of their respect for holy shrines, and sites, Sufi rituals and Sufi leaders, especially by some extremist groups. Some radical clerics excommunicate (takfir) Sufis and even call them "Najes" (impure or untouchable). For example, Abu Bakr Safi, a radical cleric, refers to one Sufi's branches, Saifi followers as impure on his YouTube channel "Al-Mustaqqimoon.<sup>3</sup>"

According to some local media, the Taliban have repeatedly prevented the gatherings of Sufis in their worship sites ("Khaniqah"). This year, the Taliban have closed several Sufi Khaneqahs in Baghlan province, including the "Baba Jani" Khaneqah near the Silo area of the city. In some cases, the Taliban's religious police have opposed the Sufi gatherings and prevented their participation in the Khaneqahs<sup>4</sup>.

On June 22, 2022, the Taliban detained Syed Mohammad Ibrahim Gilani, known as Pir Ibrahim Baba, the leader of the Qaderiya Sufi branch, in Paktia. According to media reports, a video recorded during his arrest shows Taliban members beating Ibrahim Gilani with cables while calling him "evil<sup>5</sup>." It is reported that Ibrahim Gilani was meeting with his followers in Paktia when the Taliban arrested him on charges of promoting superstitions. The following day, on

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<sup>3</sup> YouTube, Al-Mustaqqimoon, Available on: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5DG0bnEkmSk>

<sup>4</sup> Hasht e Subh daily, "setiz mazhabi taliban; sufian dar nahrin baghlan qablan tahdid shoda bodand", Nov 24, 2024, Available on: <https://8am.media/fa/taliban-religious-conflict-sufis-in-nahrin-baghlan-had-previously-been-threatened/>

<sup>5</sup> Independent Persian, "Taliban yaki az aazaye khanawaada rahbar ferqa qaderiyya ra bazzasht kard", Jun 23, 2022, Available on: [---

2](https://www.independentpersian.com/node/248306/%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%DB%8C-%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B9%DB%8C-%D8%B7%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%86-%DB%8C%DA%A9%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%B6%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%AE%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%87-%D8%B1%D9%87%D8%A8%D8%B1-%D9%81%D8%B1%D9%82%D9%87-%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B1%DB%8C%D9%87-%D8%B1%D8%A7-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B2%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%AA-%DA%A9%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%86%D8%AF</a></p></div><div data-bbox=)

June 23, hundreds of his followers protested in Kandahar city<sup>6</sup>. It is said that the Gilani family is descended from Syed Abdul Qadir Gilani, the founder of the Qaderiya Sufi branch.

On November 26, 2017, the tombs of two 400-year-old Sufis in the Muqoor district of Ghazni province were set on fire. Unknown individuals torched the tombs of two Sufis, known as "Baha al-Haq Baba" and "Mulla Wali Nika," in the Zarkashan area of Muqoor district. These two tombs were highly respected by the local people<sup>7</sup>. No group claimed responsibility for the incident, but the spokesperson for Ghazni's governor told the media that this attack looks like actions of the ISKP<sup>8</sup>.

Non-Muslim religious minorities, especially Sikhs, face more harassment in Afghanistan than others. Despite having a long history in the country, these religious minorities have been subjected to severe discrimination. Sikhs have faced humiliation, insults, discrimination, land confiscation, physical abuse, and even murder. The majority of the Hindu and Sikh community, over the course of more than four decades of war and insecurity, has been forced to leave the country due to discrimination and the lack of safety.

Though there was no exact census of Hindu and Sikhs population in Afghanistan, population of Hindus and Sikhs in Afghanistan decreased in 1990s<sup>9</sup>. A representative of Hindus and Sikhs in Afghanistan said on January 18, 2024, that when the Taliban took power, around 900 Hindu and Sikh followers left the country, and only a few remained. Man Mohan Singh Khurana, the head of the Sikh worship place in Kabul, said that when the Taliban came to power, over 1,000 Sikh followers were living in the country, and the Taliban promised to ensure their security. However, after an attack on their Gurdwara in Karte Parwan, Kabul, at the end of 2022, the majority of them left the country<sup>10</sup>. According to the U.S. Department of State, the number of Hindus and Sikhs in Afghanistan reduced to 96 in August 2022<sup>11</sup>. On September 25, 2022, 55 Hindus and Sikhs had left for India<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> BBC PERSIAN, "Aramgah do sufi ba qedamat charsad saal dar ghazni aatash zada shodand", Nov 27, 2017, Available on: <https://www.bbc.com/persian/afghanistan-42136877>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

<sup>9</sup> United Nations, Situation of Human Rights in Afghanistan, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, Feb 9, 2023, 7, A/HRC/52/84

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Department of State, 2024 Report on International Religious Freedom: Afghanistan, 11

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Department of State, 2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Afghanistan, 9

<sup>12</sup> United Nations, Situation of Human Rights in Afghanistan, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, Feb 9, 2023, 8, A/HRC/52/84

In a survey conducted in 2018, 67% of Hindus and Sikhs reported that lack of access to education was their biggest problem<sup>13</sup>. In addition, harassment, insecurity, war, unemployment, poverty, and lack of housing were also among their major problems. According to the survey, 96.8% of Hindus and Sikhs feared for their or their families' safety<sup>14</sup>.

During the first period of Taliban rule in Afghanistan, Hindus and Sikhs were forced to wear yellow clothing by the Taliban's decree to distinguish them from Muslim citizens<sup>15</sup>. Similarly, they were required to fly a yellow flag above their religious centers (Gurdwara) to set them apart from other places.

In the most part of the country, Hindu and Sikh children do not attend public schools alongside Muslim children due to mistreatment and harassment. As a result, Hindu and Sikhs established their own private schools for their children to ensure they are not deprived of the right to education<sup>16</sup>. Land and property seizures from Hindus and Sikhs have been reported more compared to any other groups. Most of these incidents occurred in the 1990s, carried out by individuals affiliated with the former Mujahideen<sup>17</sup>.

Ahmadiyya Muslims are also subjected to persecution and discrimination. Since the Taliban came to power, this religious sect has been threatened and lives in fear. Representatives of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community have stated that after the Taliban's return to power, Ahmadiyya followers in Afghanistan have refrained from going to their place of worship in Kabul due to fear of harassment. According to them, hundreds of Ahmadiyya members have fled the country since the Taliban took control. They have also reported that Ahmadiyya followers are constantly threatened by the Taliban through phone calls or letters<sup>18</sup>.

There have been reports of the detention of Ahmadiyya followers, abusing them and falsely accusing them of belonging to ISKP. Ten of them were released in late 2021 on the condition that they repent their Ahmadiyya beliefs and attend a Taliban-led madrassa. Eighteen of them

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<sup>13</sup> Porsesh Research & Studies Organization, "Survey of the Afghan Hindus and Sikhs", By: Ehsan Shayegan, Mahdi Frough, Sayed Massood Sadat, 18, Available on: [https://www.prresearch.us/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Survey-of-the-Afghan-Hindus-Sikhs-English.pdf?\\_gl=1\\*1tdlnur\\*\\_ga\\*NTE1NzgyNTg3LjE3MzMxNTkwMTM.\\*\\_ga\\_P9XFE49L1W\\*MTczMzE1OTAxMi4xLjEuMTczMzE1OTE1Mi4wLjAuMA..](https://www.prresearch.us/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Survey-of-the-Afghan-Hindus-Sikhs-English.pdf?_gl=1*1tdlnur*_ga*NTE1NzgyNTg3LjE3MzMxNTkwMTM.*_ga_P9XFE49L1W*MTczMzE1OTAxMi4xLjEuMTczMzE1OTE1Mi4wLjAuMA..)

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 24

<sup>15</sup> BBC PERSIAN, "Az bi sarpanahi ta muzahimat dar suzandan jasad; moshkelat sik bodan dar Afghanistan", Jul 3, 2018, Available on: <https://www.bbc.com/persian/afghanistan-44645055>

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> United Nations, Situation of Human Rights in Afghanistan, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, Feb 9, 2023, 8, A/HRC/52/84

<sup>18</sup> U.S. Department of State, 2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Afghanistan, 16

remained in detention until late July 2022<sup>19</sup>. In addition to the Ahmadiyya sect, Christians, Hindus, and Sikhs have also complained about the Taliban's threats against them. Some Sikhs have reported harassment by the Taliban in their worship places (Gurdwaras)<sup>20</sup>.

Similar treatments were made towards Muslim Shia, Ismailia minority in Afghanistan. A large number of Ismailia Community had to flee the country because of persecution under the Taliban. Members of Ismailia minority were forced to convert and attend madrassas for learning about Taliban way of Islam.

The Taliban have established dozens of Sunni religious schools (madrasa) in Badakhshan, including in the districts of Shighnan, Ishkashim, Zibaak, and Yomgan and changed their worship places (Jamaat Khana) to Sunni Mosque with the aim of converting Ismailia followers<sup>21</sup>. They have warned the Ismailia followers to send their children to these schools without objection, so that they change their religion and become Muslims. Media reports indicate that so far, 600 children between 7 and 12, followers of Ismailia have enrolled in these schools, and local residents have been prohibited from attending the worship places of their own religion<sup>22</sup>. One of Ismailis followers said: "Unfortunately, some Ismailia followers have been forced to convert to Sunni Islam<sup>23</sup>".

A religious school named "Imam Hussain" was built by the Taliban in October 2024 in the Shighnan district<sup>24</sup>. Media reports stated that around 200 Ismailia students are studying at this

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<sup>19</sup> Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, 85, Jul 30, 2022, Available on: <https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/quarterlyreports/2022-07-30qr.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

<sup>21</sup> Hasht e Subh daily, "Taliban dar Badakhshan Ismaili ra majbor ba feristadan farzandan shan ba madrasa hay ahl e sunnat mikonand," Jan 23, 2023, Available on: <https://8am.media/fa/the-taliban-in-badakhshan-force-ismailis-to-send-their-children-to-sunni-schools/>

<sup>22</sup> Ibid

<sup>23</sup> DW, "Pairawan Islamailia: dar barabar azaar wa tabiez tanha gozashta shodim", Aug 29, 2024, Available on: <https://www.dw.com/fa-af/%D9%BE%DB%8C%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B9%DB%8C%D9%84%D8%8C%D9%87%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%B1-%D8%A2%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D9%88%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%8B9%D8%8C%D8%B6%D8%AA%D9%86%D9%87%D8%A7-%DA%AF%D8%B0%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%B4%D8%AF%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%8C%D9%85/a-70077694>

<sup>24</sup> Ministry of Education, "dar marbotat wilayat Badakhshan yak bab madrasa dini goshyesh yaft", Oct 5, 2024, Available on: <https://moe.gov.af/index.php/dr/%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%88%D8%B7%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%88%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%8C%D8%AA-%D8%A8%D8%AF%D8%AE%D8%B4%D8%A7%D9%86-%DB%8C%DA%A9-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D9%85%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%B3%D9%87-%D8%AF%DB%8C%D9%86%D8%8C-%DA%AF%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%8C%D8%B4-%DB%8C%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%AA>

school; however, all the teachers are Sunni. A resident of the district mentioned that the subjects being taught to their children are different from their religious beliefs<sup>25</sup>.

According to Afghanistan Human Rights Center an Ismailia man who was a guard at an Ismailia worship place (Jamaat Khana) in the center of Zibak district in Badakhshan province was hanged inside this worship place during the night. This incident took place on December 12, 2024, and was carried out by unknown individuals. Another report indicate killing of an Ismaili child. No one has claimed responsibility for this event, but local people believe that the Taliban are behind the incident. This belief arises because the Taliban have consistently harassed and persecuted Ismailia followers and do not even consider them Muslims. Local Taliban members have previously forced some Ismailia followers to convert their religion, claiming they invited them to Islam, while Ismaili Shia followers are Muslims.

### **Attack Against Sufis**

Followers of Sufism live in various provinces of Afghanistan. There are four major Sufi branches known as Chishtiya, Qadriya, Naqshbandiya, and Suhrawardiya, and in recent decades, another branch called "Najiya" has also been established<sup>26</sup>. Islamic extremists' groups are opposed to the beliefs of Sufis and accuse them of polytheism due to their reverence for mystics and prayers in places of worship. The majority of attacks against Sufis have been carried out by the ISKP; however, no group has claimed responsibility for some of the attacks.

According to Afghanistan Human Rights Center, the number of targeted attacks against Sufis has increased since the Taliban came to power in 2021. The rise in targeted attacks against Sufis is a cause for serious concern. From 2020 to the present, six attacks have been carried out against Sufis, resulting in 125 deaths and 214 injuries. Four of these attacks have been carried out against Sufis since the Taliban returned and killed 114 people and injured 189 others. These four attacks included bombings with improvised explosive devices (IEDs), shootings, and suicide attacks on Sufi worship places and religious gatherings, no group has claimed responsibility for three of the attacks, but ISKP has taken responsibility for the fourth attack<sup>27</sup>.

On November 22, 2024, unknown armed individuals attacked a Sufi worship place in the Nahrin district of Baghlan province, killing 11 people. The attack took place when worshipers had gathered at the "Sayed Pacha Jan Agha" shrine on Thursday evening to perform their prayers. When local people arrived for the morning prayers the following day, they found the bodies of

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<sup>25</sup> Rukhshan Media, "Badakhshan Ismaili community fears new Taliban religious school is seeking to erase local traditions and beliefs", Nov 11, 2024, Available on: <https://rukhsana.com/en/badakhshan-ismaili-community-fears-new-taliban-religious-school-is-seeking-to-erase-local-traditions-and-beliefs>

<sup>26</sup> BBC PERSIAN, "tasawwuf Islami dar Afghanistan; moshkilaat-4, By: Safiullah Aminzada, available on: [https://www.bbc.com/persian/afghanistan/2011/03/110330\\_k02-af-sufism-4](https://www.bbc.com/persian/afghanistan/2011/03/110330_k02-af-sufism-4)

<sup>27</sup> UNAMA, Impact of Improvised Explosive Devices on Civilian Casualties, 6

the victims in the shrine<sup>28</sup>. ISKP claimed responsibility for the attack<sup>29</sup>. The Taliban confirmed the news through a statement, claiming that several people had been arrested on suspicion of being involved in the attack, and an investigation had been launched<sup>30</sup>. The local people told the AHRC that followers of this shrine were threatened by the Taliban commander of the district.

In 2022, three attacks against Sufi mosques were recorded. These attacks took place in the provinces of Kunduz and Kabul, and no group claimed responsibility for any of them.

On April 22, in Kunduz province, a suicide bomber entered the Mawlawi Sikander religious school (*Madrasa*) and detonated his explosive vest, killing at least 50 people and injuring 55 others. This attack occurred during a Sufi religious gathering. No group claimed responsibility for this attack either<sup>31</sup>.

On April 29, a bomb (IED) was detonated inside the *Khalifa Sahib* Mosque in Kabul province, killing 33 people and injuring 101 others<sup>32</sup>. The Imam of the mosque told media that over 50 people were killed in the incident<sup>33</sup>. This attack also took place during a Sufi religious gathering, and no group claimed responsibility for it<sup>34</sup>.

On August 17, 2022, a powerful explosion occurred inside Sedeqiya Mosque in the Khair Khana area of Kabul city, killing 21 people and injuring 33 others. The mosque's imam, "Amir Mohammad Kabuli," was among the dead. The attack took place when a large number of

<sup>28</sup> The Times of India, "10 killed in Sufi shrine attack in Afghanistan, says interior ministry", Nov 22, 2024, Available on: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/south-asia/10-killed-in-sufi-shrine-attack-in-afghanistan-says-interior-ministry/articleshow/115560788.cms>

<sup>29</sup> Amu TV, "ISKP claims responsibility for deadly attack of Sufi shrine in Afghanistan, Nov 25, 2024, Available on: <https://amu.tv/139305/>

<sup>30</sup> Afghanistan International, "Multiple People Arrested On Suspicion of Involvement in Baghlan Attack, Says Taliban", Nov 22, 2024. Available on: <https://www.afintl.com/en/202411222247>

<sup>31</sup> UNAMA, Human Rights in Afghanistan, 15 August 2021 – 15 June 2022, 11, Available on: [https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unama\\_human\\_rights\\_in\\_afghanistan\\_report\\_-\\_june\\_2022\\_english.pdf](https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unama_human_rights_in_afghanistan_report_-_june_2022_english.pdf)

32 Ibid

<sup>33</sup> DW, "Rahbar khaniqah sufian: dar infejaar bish az 50 tan kushta shodand", Apr 30, 2022, Available on: <https://www.dw.com/fa-af/%D8%B1%D9%87%D8%A8%D8%B1-%D8%AE%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%87-%D8%B5%D9%88%D9%81%DB%8C%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%81%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%A8%D8%DB%8C%D8%B4-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%DB%85%DB%80-%D8%AA%D9%86-%DA%A9%D8%B4%D8%AA%D9%87-%D8%B4%D8%AF%D9%86%D8%AF/a-61644590>

<sup>34</sup> UNAMA, Human Rights in Afghanistan, 15 August 2021 – 15 June 2022, 11

people had gathered for the evening prayers. No group claimed responsibility for this attack<sup>35</sup>. Amir Mohammad Kabuli, the imam of the mosque, was a moderate Sufi<sup>36</sup>.

On May 14, 2021, a bomb exploded inside a Sufi Mosque in the Shakardara district of Kabul province, killing 10 people (two children and eight men) and injuring 25 others (four children and 21 men). The explosion occurred when followers of Sufism had gathered for Friday prayers at the mosque<sup>37</sup>.

On December 3, 2020, in Jalalabad city, Nangarhar province, a Sufi cleric was shot and killed by ISKP militants due to his religious beliefs<sup>38</sup>.

### **Attack Against Sikh**

From 2018 until now, four attacks against Sikhs in Afghanistan have been recorded. According to investigations by the Afghanistan Human Rights Center, these four attacks resulted in 42 deaths and 39 injuries. ISKP claimed responsibility for all of these attacks.

On June 18, 2022, ISKP militants attacked a place of worship of the Sikh religious minority in Kabul, resulting in 2 deaths and 7 injuries. According to the spokesperson for the Taliban Ministry of Interior, one Sikh and one Taliban security force member were among the dead. The spokesperson explained that the attackers threw hand grenades at security guards and stormed the temple<sup>39</sup>. ISKP claimed responsibility for the attack through an affiliated Telegram channel, said the attack was in response to insults leveled at the Prophet Mohammad, made by a spokesperson of the ruling party of India<sup>40</sup>.

On March 25, 2020, armed attackers using firearms and hand grenades stormed a Sikh religious place of worship known as the "Gurdwara" in the Shorbazar area of Kabul city, killing 26 civilians and injuring 11 others. The attack occurred when about 150 Sikhs, including men, women, and children, were participating in a religious ceremony. The attackers held several Sikhs hostage inside the Gurdwara for several hours<sup>41</sup>. Next day, on March 26, an improvised

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<sup>35</sup> BBC, Afghanistan: Deadly blast rips through crowded Kabul mosque, Aug 18, 2022, Available on: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-62581102>

<sup>36</sup> Ibid

<sup>37</sup> UNAMA, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Midyear Update: 1 Jan to 30 Jun 2021, 11 and 12

<sup>38</sup> UNAMA, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual report 2020, 56

<sup>39</sup> U.S. Department of State, 2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Afghanistan, 14

<sup>40</sup> Reuters, Islamic State claims attack on Sikh temple in Kabul that killed two, Jun 20, 2022, Available on: <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/blast-hits-sikh-temple-afghan-capital-kabul-temple-official-2022-06-18/>

<sup>41</sup> NBC NEWS, Gunmen attack Sikh religious gathering in Kabul, killing at least 4, Mar 25, 2020, Available on: <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/gunmen-attack-sikh-religious-gathering-kabul-killing-least-4-n1168201>

explosive device (IED) was detonated near a Sikh cremation ceremony held for the victims of the attack, injuring one civilian. ISKP claimed responsibility for both attacks<sup>42</sup>.

On July 1, 2018, a suicide bomber targeted a convoy of Sikhs on the road to the city of Jalalabad, Nangarhar province, killing 19 people and injuring 20 others. According to representatives of the Hindu and Sikh communities, 15 of the dead were Sikh<sup>43</sup>. Some Hindus and Sikhs were on their way to meet former Afghan President Ashraf Ghani in Jalalabad when the attack took place. Among the victims were Avtar Singh Khalesa and Ravel Singh, two prominent leaders of the Hindu and Sikh communities. Avtar Singh Khalesa was the only candidate nominated by the Sikh community for the parliamentary elections<sup>44</sup>. ISKP claimed responsibility for the attack<sup>45</sup>. After the attack, one of the Sikh representatives complained to Afghanistan's security agencies, telling the media: "We are very unhappy with the security agencies. Our relatives were burning in the fire, they neither allowed us to help nor did they cooperate themselves. If they had helped, more people would not have died<sup>46</sup>."

A 22- year-old Sikh man named Arjit Singh was abducted in Kabul in the spring of 2019. His body was discovered two months later by the Kabul police. Arjit Singh's family told the media that before this incident, members of their family had also been abducted in Kunduz and Herat<sup>47</sup>.

Attacks against religious minorities have severely impacted their lives. As previously mentioned, the majority of Hindus and Sikhs left the country after the Taliban took power. Similarly, a large

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<sup>42</sup> UNAMA, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual report 2020, 56

<sup>43</sup> Pajhwok Afghan News, "*Sikha dar roidad Jalalabad az adam hamkaari idaraat amniati shekayat kardand*", Jul 3, 2018, Available on: <https://pajhwok.com/fa/2018/07/03/%D8%B3%DB%8C%DA%A9-%D9%87%D8%A7-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%B1%D9%88%DB%8C%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%AC%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%A2%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D8%B9%D8%AF%D9%85-%D9%87%D9%85%DA%A9%D8%A7%D8%B1%DB%8C/>

<sup>44</sup> Hindu American Foundation, "Suicide attack in Afghanistan Kills Last Prominent Leaders of Dwindling Sikh & Hindu Community", Jul 2, 2018, Available on: <https://www.hinduamerican.org/press/suicide-attack-afghanistan-kills-last-prominent-leaders-dwindling-sikh-and-hindu-community>

<sup>45</sup> BBC PERSIAN, Jul 1, 2018, Available on: <https://www.bbc.com/persian/afghanistan-44677213>

<sup>46</sup> Pajhwok Afghan News, "*Sikha dar roidad Jalalabad az adam hamkaari idaraat amniati shekayat kardand*", Jul 3, 2018

<sup>47</sup> Tolo News, "*Khanawada Sikh: Police dar Nijat dadan pisar maan be parwayee karda ast*", May 14, 2019, Available on: <https://tolonews.com/fa/afghanistan/%D8%AE%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%87-%D8%B3%DB%8C%DA%A9%D9%87%D9%80-%D9%BE%D9%88%D9%84%DB%8C%D8%B3-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D9%86%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%86-%D9%BE%D8%B3%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A8%D8%8C%D8%8C%D9%BE%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%86-%D8%A9%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%87-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA>

number of Bahá'ís and followers of the Ahmadiyya sect have either fled the country or are attempting to find a way to leave. Those who remain inside the country are being threatened and, as a result, hold their religious ceremonies in secret.

## **Legal Framework and Recommendations**

According to the Geneva Conventions, which were adopted in 1949, civilians who are not participating in armed conflict must not be targeted. Common Article 3 of the conventions explicitly prohibits violence to life and person, including murder, mutilation, cruel treatment and torture, hostage-taking, as well as outrages against personal dignity and extrajudicial executions, at any time and in any place with respect to persons taking no active part in hostilities, including civilians<sup>48</sup>.

Based on the Rome Statute, if person or property protected under the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, are willfully subjected to killing, torture, inhuman treatment, or causing great suffering or serious injury to body or health, or are taken hostage, these acts are considered war crimes<sup>49</sup>. Attacks that deliberately target civilians are serious violations of international humanitarian law and are considered war crimes. When committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack against any civilian's population, with knowledge of the attack, may constitute crimes against humanity<sup>50</sup>. Additionally, if deliberate attacks are made against any identifiable group or collectively on political, racial, ethnic, religious, national, cultural, or gender-based group, these attacks may also amount to the crime of persecution. Persecution refers to the intentional and severe deprivation of the fundamental rights of a group or population in violation of international law due to their group identity<sup>51</sup>. Persecution may be regarded as a form of crime against humanity.

The increase in attacks against Sufis, Hindus, and Sikhs in Afghanistan is deeply concerning. Despite the Taliban's claims that security is maintained across the country and no terrorist groups operate in Afghanistan, the terrorist attacks against ethnic and religious minorities have escalated. The widespread discrimination imposed by the Taliban on ethnic and religious minorities has created a more volatile environment, and such attacks are likely to increase.

The ruling group in Afghanistan is responsible for protecting Afghan citizens regardless of their ethnicity, religion, language, or gender. Before anything else, the Taliban must promptly revoke their discriminatory policies against ethnic and religious minorities and women and respect the rights and freedoms of all individuals.

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<sup>48</sup> Geneva Conventions, Aug 12, 1949, common article 3,

<sup>49</sup> Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, article 8

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, article 7, paragraph 1

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, article 7, paragraph 8 and 18

The Afghanistan Human Rights Center calls on the United Nations to conduct a comprehensive investigation into the attacks against religious minorities, including the attacks on Hazara, Sufi, Hindu, and Sikh communities.

The Afghanistan Human Rights Center urges the International Criminal Court which investigate international crimes in Afghanistan to include investigation of the attacks on Hazara, Sufi, Hindu, and Sikh and Ismailia communities and bring the perpetrators to justice.

The Afghanistan Human Rights Center calls on the United Nations and its member states to take appropriate measures including sanctions and diplomatic pressure on the Taliban to respect the rights and freedoms of all Afghanistan citizens.