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Afghanistan: Documents required to travel within Afghanistan, documents required to pass checkpoints (2013-January 2015)

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Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. Documents Required for Internal Travel

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a representative at the Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN), an independent, non-profit policy and research organization based in Afghanistan (AAN n.d.), indicated that "[t]here is no systematic requirement for documents to travel within Afghanistan" (ibid. 20 Jan. 2016). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a representative at the Civil Society and Human Rights Network (CSHRN), a civil society organization that promotes human rights and the rule of law in Afghanistan (CSHRN n.d.), similarly indicated that Afghan citizens can travel within the country without possessing "any kind of documents" (ibid. 21 Jan. 2016). The AAN representative noted that

children and female family members rarely have identification documents. Even for flights within Afghanistan, there is no consistent practice of checking identification documents against the names on the tickets. Also, names are often misspelled to an extent that they are no longer clearly recognizable, which makes the checking of identification documents for this purpose less efficient. (AAN 20 Jan. 2016)

Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Sources indicate that individuals sometimes carry their tazkira [taskera] in public (CSHRN 21 Jan. 2016; AAN 20 Jan. 2016). The AAN representative further noted that in many cases, this document is carried in the form of a paper or plastic copy, as older tazkiras are "often torn and on the verge of falling apart" (ibid.). For further information about tazkiras, see Responses to Information Requests AFG103918, AFG103812, and AFG104742. According to the same source,

in urban areas, people will bring an identification document with them; in rural areas, identification documents are less common, as they might not be carried around on a daily basis and only used when going to a government office, for example. People who work outside of the house in a business or office usually have a bank card or a plastic company identification card, which they would carry with them as a form of identification. (ibid.)

The AAN representative indicated that people who work for international organizations or NGOs "usually" have identification cards with them; however, they sometimes choose to leave them behind when going into the field or outside major urban areas to avoid being identified (ibid.). The CSHRN representative similarly stated that carrying an identification card from an organization or a passport "makes the risk double" for its holder (CSHRN 21 Jan. 2016). The same source noted that neither passports nor identification cards from organizations are common identity documents in Afghanistan (ibid.).

According to the AAN representative, the current Afghan government has been promoting formal registration to obtain identification cards, "which are now a standard requirement for any requests from the government, including access to education, to obtaining employment, bank accounts, etc." (20 Jan. 2016). Corroborating information on formal registration in order to obtain identification cards could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2. Checkpoints

The US Department of State's 2015 Crime and Safety Report for Afghanistan indicates that "[r]oadblocks and checkpoints controlled by the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and by random 'insurgent' forces remain a problem" (US 21 Apr. 2015). According to sources, extortion occurs at checkpoints run by authorities (ibid. 25 June 2015, 26; IWA Nov. 2013, 1). The US Department of State's Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2014 for Afghanistan indicates that security forces and armed insurgents set up illegal checkpoints to extort money and goods from travellers (US 25 June 2015, 26). A survey [1] undertaken by Integrity Watch Afghanistan (IWA), a civil society organization that promotes transparency, accountability, and anti-corruption efforts in the country (IWA 5 Jan. 2015), reports that during a delivery, an average truck driver "has to go through numerous police checkpoints in addition to some checkpoints [administered] by other government organizations" and that "there is a fair chance of meeting bandits and occasionally insurgents along their routes" (ibid. Nov. 2013, 1). The survey also indicates that the average amount of money extorted from truck drivers is approximately 300 Afghanis (AFN) [approximately C\$6.19], and that the amount varies between provinces; the provinces of Jowzjan and Samangan experience the lowest extortion rates with an average of 20 AFN [approximately C\$0.21], while the province of Kohistan boasts the highest at 2,750 AFN [approximately C\$56.74] (ibid.).

2.1 Checkpoints Administered by Afghan National Police (ANP) and Afghan National Army (ANA)

The US 2015 Crime and Safety Report for Afghanistan indicates that "[a]ppropriate identification is generally sufficient to permit passage through government-run checkpoints" (US 21 Apr. 2015). According to the CSHRN representative, the ANP and the ANA can require an Afghan citizen to produce their tazkira, or, if not in possession of one, their passport or identification card issued by

their employer (21 Jan. 2016). The AAN representative also stated that "[s]ometimes, [ANP and ANA officers] will ask local people for [an] identity document at checkpoints, in particular in the evenings [and] especially in the aftermath of an attack, but, overall, they do not expect people to have any official documentation on them" (AAN 20 Jan. 2016). The same sources noted that ANP and ANA officers are "often illiterate" and might not be able to read identification documents (ibid.). The AAN representative further indicated that

[l]ocal people use a variety of identifying documents at checkpoints, which could include bank cards, or any type of document with a photo on it, or a thumbprint/signature ... It is common that people will not have any identity (official) documents on them and just hand over any document that might be acceptable. Signatures are also uncommon on cards and documents (especially on older documents), and many people use a thumbprint instead, in particular, illiterate persons. (ibid.)

According to the survey administered by IWA, illegal tolls were regularly taken by police at 59 percent of police checkpoints (IWA Nov. 2013, 1). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2.2 Checkpoints Administered by the Taliban and Other Armed Groups

According to the CSHRN representative, the Taliban and other illegal armed groups ask citizens to produce their tazkira in order to gain knowledge of their places of birth, ethnicity, and religion (CSHRN 21 Jan. 2016). The same source indicated that people may be exposed to harm by these groups if they find out that a person carries an identification card from an international organization or a visa from a western country stamped in the Afghan passport (ibid.). The AAN representative indicated that

[a]t checkpoints in Taliban areas, the Taliban are used to encountering people with no identity documents, or very old identity documents. Local people are actually better off not having any identity documents when traveling in these areas. It would be a problem for a person to say they didn't have any and then for the Taliban to later find one. (AAN 20 Jan. 2016)

Additional information on checkpoints administered by the Taliban and other armed groups could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

Note

[1] The IWA survey was conducted during 24 trips undertaken by enumerators on trucks "along the main Afghan highways" in 2012; 149 truck drivers were interviewed at the main transport hubs of the country (IWA Nov. 2013, 1).

References

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