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Information on the Hazara.

An undated document published on the Joshua Project website, in a paragraph headed “Introduction / History”, states:

“The Hazara are a people of distinctions - set apart from fellow Afghans by religion, mixed ethnicity and an independent nature - and they have suffered for them. Persecution has shaped and defined the Hazara, particularly over the last 200 years. They face discrimination as Shi'ite Muslims, a minority among Afghanistan's dominant Sunni Muslims, as well as for ethnic bias.” (Joshua Project (undated) *Hazara of Afghanistan*)

A report published by the independent NGO Afghanistan Watch, in a section titled “Political and Historical Context”, states:

“The Hazara people are commonly defined as an ethno-linguistic group from central Afghanistan that is Persian-speaking and of the Shia or Ismaili sects of Islam. Population estimates range from 2.5 to 5 million, representing 9 to 18 percent of the population of Afghanistan. They are generally non-tribal and until the late 1980s did not have a cohesive political structure, instead being dominated by factionalism, with various elements of the Shia clergy, traditional khans and the military class competing amongst themselves. Since then, the Hazaras have slowly emerged as a cultural and political force in Afghan national politics, particularly under the leadership of Abdul Ali Mazari, the first head of the Hezb-e Wahdat-e Islami Afghanistan, or the Islamic Unity Party of Afghanistan.” (Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) (July 2012) *Natural Resources and Conflict in Afghanistan*, p.29)

This section of the report also states:

“Since the fall of the monarchy in the 1970s and particularly in the post-Taliban period since 2001, the Hazaras as a group have been in slow but steady ascendance in Afghan society. While they remain a vulnerable and often marginalized minority, their political representation, levels of education and economic position have generally improved. They now represent a major proportion of the population of Kabul -- perhaps 40 percent -- and have a growing consciousness of ethnic pride and solidarity, whereas in the past many among them were inclined to strategically deny their ethnicity or religion to avoid discrimination.” (ibid, p.30)

The US Department of State country report on Afghanistan for 2012, in a section titled “National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities”, states:

“Ethnic tensions between various groups continued to result in conflict and killings. For example, in November riots occurred at Kabul University after Sunni students tried to prevent ethnic Hazara students from observing Shiite religious practices. Societal discrimination against Shia Hazaras continued along class, race, and religious lines in the form of extortion of money through illegal taxation, forced

recruitment and forced labor, physical abuse, and detention. Clashes between ethnic Hazaras and the nomadic Kuchi tribes continued, with Hazaras alleging that Kuchis attempted to illegally seize their lands.” (US Department of State (19 April 2013) 2012 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Afghanistan, p.45)

The US Department of State report on religious freedom in Afghanistan, in a section titled “Government Practices”, states:

“The predominantly Shia Hazara community accused the government of providing preferential treatment to Sunni Pashtuns and of ignoring minorities, especially Hazaras. However, the government made efforts to address historical tensions affecting the Hazara community. In June, Hazara politicians expressed outrage over a book the Afghanistan Academy of Sciences attempted to publish that allegedly portrayed Hazaras as un-Islamic. President Karzai dismissed four academics and denounced the book.” (US Department of State (20 May 2013) *2012 Report on International Religious Freedom: Afghanistan*, pp.9-10)

In a section titled “Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom” this report states:

“There were reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Because ethnicity and religion are often inextricably linked, especially in the case of the Hazara ethnic group, which is predominantly Shia, it was difficult to categorize many incidents specifically as ethnic or religious intolerance. Relations between the different branches of Islam remained somewhat strained, despite relative harmony compared to years past. Historically, the minority Shia faced discrimination from the majority Sunni population. As Shia representation increased in government, overt discrimination by Sunnis against the Shia community decreased. However, Sunni resentment over growing Shia influence was expressed widely and often linked to claims of Iranian efforts to influence local culture and politics. Most Shia are members of the Hazara ethnic group, which was traditionally segregated from the rest of society for a combination of political, historical, ethnic, and religious factors, some of which resulted in conflicts.” (ibid, pp.10-11)

An eligibility guidelines document issued by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, in a section titled “Hazaras”, states:

“Hazaras have also been reported to face continuing societal discrimination, as well as to be targeted for extortion through illegal taxation, forced recruitment and forced labour, and physical abuse. Pashtuns are reportedly increasingly resentful of the Hazara minority, who have historically been marginalized and discriminated against by the Pashtuns, but who have made significant economic and political advances since the 2001 fall of the Taliban regime. Nevertheless, Hazaras have accused the Government of giving preferential treatment to Pashtuns at the expense of minorities in general and Hazaras in particular. Hazaras are also reported to continue to be subject to harassment, intimidation and killings at the hands of the Taliban and other AGEs.” (UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (6 August 2013) UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan, pp.67-68)

A New York Times article states:

“Few suffered as much at the Taliban’s hands as the Hazara, the moderate Shiite ethnic minority that makes up most of the population in Bamian Province. They were

massacred by the thousands during the civil war and the ensuing reign of the Taliban, who are mostly ethnic Pashtuns. Before their ouster, the Taliban also destroyed Bamian's most famous landmarks, two giant Buddhas that had gazed across the rough plains from their honeycomb sandstone hills for 1,500 years. Their ruins stand as a reminder of the cycles of devastation that have swept this region. In the years since, the Hazaras have established an island of relative stability behind Bamian's high mountain borders." (New York Times (30 October 2012) *Taliban Hit Region Seen as 'Safest' for Afghans*)

This article also states:

"In July, gunmen killed an American engineer traveling on the Kabul-Bamian road. In September, five Hazaras were killed on another connecting road through Wardak Province. The main Hazara political leader has been targeted in attacks." (ibid)

An Agence France Presse report comments on conflict between the Hazara and Kuchi ethnic groups states:

"For more than a century, ethnic Pashtuns known as Kuchis have wintered in the south and east where the weather is better, and migrated in the summer to let their herds graze in the cooler north. But a land dispute between the Kuchis and the settled ethnic Hazaras dating back 130 years has since 2005 disintegrated into seasonal violence in the Kajab valley west of the capital. With NATO forces due to leave Afghanistan by the end of 2014, there are fears that the country could slide back to the chaos seen in the 1990s, when ethnically aligned factions fought a bloody civil war. From the early 1990s to 2001 fighting between the Pashtun-dominated Taliban and Hazaras led to tens of thousands of deaths, particularly on the Hazara side. 'Afghans have suffered a lot in internal and mainly ethnic wars in the past, and this problem, if left unsolved could hurt the volatile national unity among Afghans even further,' said author and analyst Waheed Mujda. In early June, up to 2,000 Kuchi nomads swept into Kajab, according to residents and local officials, ransacking several villages and burning hundreds of buildings. Most of the valley's population of ethnic Hazaras, who are also part of the Shiite Muslim minority, fled. According to villagers, the Kuchis killed four Hazaras and seven soldiers." (Agence France Presse (6 August 2012) *Afghan nomad clashes raise fears of ethnic strife*)

A Landinfo Country of Origin Information Centre response to a request for information on this conflict states:

"A focus on ethnicity and religious affiliation lays the foundation for political manipulation and an escalation of the conflict. The conflict concerning the areas in Wardak has been raised in parliament on several occasions. In 2010, Haji Mohammad Muhaqqeq, the Hazara leader of the Islamic Unity Party of Afghanistan, stated that he would go on a hunger strike unless the authorities took the conflict seriously and removed the Kuchis from the area. A Kuchi member of parliament Alam Gol Kochi is said to have argued as follows: 'They [the Hazaras] started the dispute and now that they are defeated they are complaining. I will reclaim the [land] as it is a right given by God' (Foschini 2010). Several Hazara members of parliament allegedly boycotted the parliament for periods of time in protest against the handling of this conflict because they argue that the Afghan authorities (Karzai) show less willingness to resolve it. One of Landinfo's interlocutors, who wishes to remain anonymous, believes that Karzai supports the Hazaras to a certain extent, while representatives of the opposition believe that Karzai is engaged with an ethnic-political game and in reality supports the Kuchis." (Landinfo Country of Origin

Information Centre (6 June 2011) *Afghanistan: The conflict between Hazaras and Kuchis in the Beshud Districts of Wardak Province*, p.4)

The Minority Rights Group International annual report on Afghanistan states:

“Ethnic tensions between Hazaras and Tajiks, reported for many years by MRG, remain a key issue in Afghanistan. In September 2012, a number of people were killed as violence broke out in Kabul between members of the two communities on the day that otherwise commemorates the death of Tajik military leader Ahmad Shah Massoud, who was killed by two Tunisian men posing as journalists in 2001. A convoy of Tajiks from the Panjshir Valley passed through the largely Hazara neighbourhood of Pol-e-Sokhta; a cyclist was injured by one of the vehicles. When the police failed to act, violence erupted. The final number of casualties from the incident was not confirmed. Known as the 'Lion of the Panjshir Valley', Massoud is officially regarded as a national hero; however Hazaras recall a devastating attack on their community in western Kabul by his forces in the early 1990s.” (Minority Rights Group International (24 September 2013) *State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2013 – Afghanistan*)

A report from ABC News of Australia states:

“A group of 30 Afghan MPs has written to the Federal Government urging it to abandon plans to return asylum seekers to Kabul. The ABC has obtained a copy of the letter, which says the security situation in the Afghan capital is getting worse and attackers are targeting members of the Hazara ethnic group.” (ABC News (13 March 2013) *Australia warned against returning Afghan refugees*)

This report also states:

“Two years ago Australia and Afghanistan signed a memorandum of understanding on the involuntary return of asylum seekers. And the MPs have expressed their appreciation to the Australian Government for taking care of so many refugees and contributing to the security and development in Afghanistan. But they believe sending Hazaras to Kabul would be a mistake.” (ibid)

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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