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U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

Afghanistan

International Religious Freedom Report 2002

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For most of 2001, the Taliban, a Pashtun-dominated ultra-conservative Islamic movement, controlled approximately 90 percent of the country, including the capital of Kabul, and all major urban areas, except Faizabad. In 1997 the Taliban issued an edict renaming the country the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, and named its leader, Mullah Omar, Head of State and Commander of the Faithful, granting him ultimate authority. Omar headed the inner Shura (Council), located in the southern city of Kandahar. Under the Taliban, freedom of religion was restricted severely. Until October 7, a rival regime, the Islamic State of Afghanistan (generally known as the Northern Alliance or United Front), which nominally was headed by former Afghanistan President Burhanuddin Rabbani, an ethnic Tajik, controlled about 10 percent of the country. Rabbani and his chief military commander, Ahmed Shah Masood, for most of the year, controlled the majority Tajik areas in the country's extreme northeast. On October 7, 2001, Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), a U.S.-led coalition, began a military action aimed at toppling the Taliban regime and eliminating the al-Qaida terrorist network in Afghanistan. U.S. forces worked in concert with anti-Taliban forces of the Northern Alliance as well as others in southern Afghanistan. By mid-November the Taliban had been removed from power and had retreated from Kabul to southwestern Afghanistan. On December 5, 2001 a U.N.-sponsored Afghan peace conference in Bonn, Germany approved a broad agreement for the establishment of a 6-month interim authority (AIA) to govern the country. The AIA Chairman, Hamid Karzai, and his cabinet took office December 22.

Since December 22, 2001, the legal basis for religious freedom in country has been found in the December 5, 2001 Bonn Agreement and in the 1964 constitution. The 1964 constitution proclaims Islam the "sacred religion of Afghanistan" and states that religious rites of the state shall be performed according to Hanafi doctrine. The Constitution also proclaims that "non-Muslim citizens shall be free to perform their rituals within the limits determined by laws for public decency and public peace." The June 2002 Loya Jirga (or Grand Assembly of traditional leaders) declared that the official name of the country is the "Islamic Transitional Government of Afghanistan (ITGA)." A Constitutional Commission mandated by the Bonn agreement is to draft a new constitution during 2002. By the end of the period covered by this report, a new constitution had not been drafted.

There was significant change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. Before the October 2001 collapse of the Taliban, repression by the Taliban of the Hazara ethnic group, which is predominantly Shi'a Muslim, was particularly severe. Although the conflict between the Hazaras and the Taliban was political and military as well as religious, and it was not possible to state with certainty that the Taliban engaged in its campaign against the Shi'a solely because of their religious beliefs, the religious affiliation of the Hazaras apparently was a significant factor leading to their repression. The Taliban sought to impose its interpretation of Islamic observances in areas that it controlled and declared that all Muslims in such areas must abide by the Taliban's interpretation of Islamic law. The Taliban relied on a religious police force to enforce rules regarding appearance, dress, employment, behavior, religious practice, and freedom of expression and access to medical care. Persons who were found to be in violation of the edicts were subject to punishment meted out on the spot, which included beatings, detention, or both. In practice, the rigid policies adopted both by the Taliban and by certain opposition groups affect adversely adherents of other branches of Islam and other faiths.

However, after the fall of the Taliban, the AIA and the ITGA stated publicly and began to pursue actively a policy of religious tolerance. The ITGA has faced opposition to a more open policy from a variety of sources, including Taliban remnants that seek a return to the pre-October 2001 system. Problems with religious freedom still exist, however. According to Human Rights Watch, since the collapse of the Taliban regime in the northern part of the country, ethnic Pashtuns throughout the country have faced widespread abuses including killings, sexual violence, beatings, and extortion. Pashtuns reportedly are targeted because their ethnic group was closely associated with the Taliban regime. According to Human Rights Watch, soon after the Taliban collapsed, Pashtun communities quickly were disarmed across the northern part of the country and faced widespread abuses at the hands of the three ethnic militias and by armed Uzbeks, Tajiks, and Hazaras not affiliated with the militias.

Relations between the different branches of Islam in the country are difficult. Historically, the minority Shi'a faced discrimination from the majority Sunni population.

Prior to the fall of the Taliban, the U.S. Government did not maintain an official presence in the country. The lack of diplomatic representation limited the U.S. Government's ability to take action to promote religious freedom. However, since the December 2001, opening of the U.S. Embassy in Kabul, the U.S. government has discussed religious freedom issues with Afghan officials in the context of its overall

dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

In October 2001, the Secretary of State identified the Taliban as a particularly severe violator of religious freedom.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has a total area of 251,738 square miles and its population is approximately 26.8 million, according to UN agencies. Reliable data on the country's religious demography is not available; a census has not been taken in decades. However, observers estimate that 84 percent of the population is Sunni Muslim; approximately 15 percent is Shi'a Muslim; and other religions, including Sikhs, Hindus, and Jews make up less than 1 percent of the population. There also is a small, extremely low-profile Christian community, in addition to small numbers of adherents of other religions. The number of adherents to strains of conservative Islam is growing.

Traditionally, Sunni Islam of the Hanafi school of jurisprudence has been the dominant religion. The Taliban also adhered to the Hanafi school of Sunni Islam, making it the dominant religion in the country for most of 2001. For the last 200 years, Sunnis often have looked to the example of the Deoband madrassah (religious school) near Delhi, India. Most of the Taliban leadership attended Deobandi-influenced seminaries in Pakistan. The Deoband school has long sought to purify Islam by discarding supposedly un-Islamic accretions to the faith and reemphasizing the models established in the Koran and the customary practices of the Prophet Mohammed. Additionally, Deobandi scholars often have opposed what they perceive as Western influences. Much of the population adheres to Deobandi-influenced Hanafi Sunnism, but a sizable minority adheres to a more mystical version of Sunnism generally known as Sufism. Sufism centers on orders or brotherhoods that follow charismatic religious leaders.

Until October 7, a rival regime, the Islamic State of Afghanistan (generally known as the Northern Alliance or United Front), which nominally is headed by former Afghanistan President Burhanuddin Rabbani, an ethnic Tajik, controlled about 10 percent of the country. Rabbani and his former chief military commander, Ahmed Shah Masood, for most of 2001, controlled the majority Tajik areas in the country's extreme northeast. Other members of the Northern Alliance include ethnic Hazara, Uzbeks, Turkmen, and other smaller groups. Some other smaller ethnic groups are Shi'a Muslims. Within the respective factions, there are economic, political, and military advantages to belonging to the dominant faith or ethnic group in a given faction. Conversely, members of a different faith may encounter disadvantages if they seek full membership in a particular faction. The Taliban brought several prominent Shi'a commanders into its organization in an effort to counter the perception that it was an exclusively Sunni Pashtun movement. The Northern Alliance included several Pashtuns in prominent roles, although its supporters largely came from the non-Pashtun minorities.

In the past, small communities of Hindus, Sikhs, Jews, and Christians lived in the country; however, most members of these communities have left. Even at their peak, these non-Muslim minorities constituted less than 1 percent of the population. Most of the country's small Hindu and Sikh population, which once numbered about 50,000 persons, emigrated or took refuge abroad during the many years of conflict. However, recently some minorities have begun to return. Non-Muslims such as Hindus and Sikhs are now estimated to number only in the hundreds.

Several areas of the country are religiously homogeneous. Sunni Muslim Pashtuns, centered around the city of Kandahar, dominate the south and east of the country. The homeland of the Shi'a Hazaras is in the Hazarajat or the mountainous central highlands around Bamiyan. Badakshan province, in the extreme northeast of the country, traditionally had an Ismaili population. Other areas, including Kabul, the capital, are more heterogeneous. For example, in and around the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif, there is a mix of Sunnis (including Pashtuns, Turkmen, Uzbeks, and Tajiks) and Shi'a (including Hazaras, Qizilbash, and Ismailis).

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

During the period covered by this report, there was no nationally recognized constitution and no legal provision for the protection of religious freedom. Under the Taliban religious freedom was restricted severely. After the collapse of the Taliban in late 2001, there continued to be some limits on religious freedom. Due to the absence of a constitution and the two decades of civil war, religious freedom was determined primarily by the unofficial, unwritten, and evolving policies of the warring factions. Before the fall of the Taliban, in most parts of the country the Taliban vigorously enforced its interpretation of Islamic law. The Taliban claimed in mid-1999 that it was drafting a new constitution, based upon the sources of Islamic religious law (Shari'a): the Koran, the Sunna, and Hanafi jurisprudence. Such a constitution was not promulgated before the fall of the Taliban. Custom and law required affiliation with some religion, and atheism is considered apostasy. Under the Taliban, apostasy was punishable by death. Proselytizing is viewed as contrary to the beliefs of Islam; however, there were no laws forbidding proselytizing.

Since the fall of the Taliban in 2001, the country has relied upon the Bonn Agreement and the 1964 Constitution. Though the 1964 Constitution proclaims that Islam is the "sacred religion", it does not prohibit the practice of other religions. The constitutional commission mandated by the Bonn agreement is to draft a new constitution during 2002, and the new constitution is to provide for religious freedom. By

the end of the period covered by this report, a new constitution had not been drafted.

Under the Taliban, the country's official name was the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan; however, according to the Northern Alliance, the umbrella organization of various smaller anti-Taliban groups, it was the Islamic State of Afghanistan. These names reflected the desire of both factions to promote Islam as the state religion. The June 2002 Loya Jirga declared that the official name of the government was the "Islamic Transitional Government of Afghanistan." The country itself is simply referred to as "Afghanistan."

The parts of the country's educational system that survived more than 20 years of war placed considerable emphasis on religion. According to international news reports in May 2001, the Taliban issued an edict requiring all students, including those in private schools, to wear head coverings. The Taliban reportedly ordered education centers to expel any student without a head covering or face the risk of closure by the religious police. However, since the fall of the Taliban, public school curricula have included religious subjects, but detailed religious study is conducted under the guidance of religious leaders. There is no restriction on parental religious teaching.

When the Taliban took Kabul in September 1996, it immediately issued pronouncements forbidding girls to go to school. According to a United Nations survey, at that time, more than 100,000 girls reportedly attended public school in Kabul from grades kindergarten to 12. From 1996 until its collapse the Taliban eliminated most of the opportunities for girls' education that existed in areas that the Taliban controlled; however, some girls' schools still operated in rural areas and small towns. The Taliban decreed that women were not allowed to attend the country's formerly coeducational universities, and one women's university, the Kabul branch of the Peshawar-based Afghan University, was closed by the Taliban in 1996. The ban on women working outside of the home reportedly also has hampered the education of boys, since 70 percent of the country's teachers were women before the Taliban took over most of the country. The new government has not repealed specific Taliban laws, considering instead that the entire Taliban system has been declared null and void.

The ITGA has proclaimed no official religious holidays.

The Government has undertaken interfaith efforts indirectly through the creation and empowerment of the Human Rights, Judicial, and Constitutional Commissions, all of which have the general aim of reconciliation at the national level.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Following the Emergency Loya Jirga in June 2002, the Minister for Women's Affairs was charged by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court with "blasphemy," for having taken a prominent and vocal role as Deputy Chair of the Emergency Loya Jirga. This resulted from a political dispute between fundamentalist factions of Afghan society and modernist factions, symbolized by the Women's Minister, Dr. Sima Samar. The charges themselves emanated from the Chief Justice's interpretation of Shari'a law. The dispute was resolved politically through the personal intervention of President Karzai, and the charges were dropped. Dr. Samar is the Chair of the Human Rights Commission.

While some Taliban leaders claimed that the Taliban was tolerant of religious minorities, it reportedly imposed some restrictions upon Shi'a Muslims in Taliban-controlled territory. For example, the Taliban allegedly ordered Shi'a Muslims to confine their Ashura commemorations during the month of Muharram to their mosques and to avoid the public processions that are an integral part of Ashura in other countries with Shi'a populations. There also were unconfirmed reports that the Taliban occupied and "cleansed" Shi'a mosques for the use of Sunnis, including a Shi'a mosque in Mazar-i-Sharif in 1998.

Under the Taliban, conversion from Islam was considered apostasy and was punishable by death. There was no information available about converts, and no information available concerning restrictions on the training of clergy. Immigrants and non-citizens are free to practice their own religions. Since the fall of the Taliban, no political parties are banned or discouraged, other than the Taliban. Christian-based international relief organizations generally operate without interference.

Under the Taliban, prayer was mandatory for all, and those who were observed not praying at appointed times or who were late attending prayer were subject to punishment, including severe beatings. Friday noon prayers at mosques reportedly were compulsory for Muslim men. However, women and girls reportedly were forbidden to enter mosques and therefore had to pray at home. Before the fall of the Taliban, women were forbidden from participating in public life, including religious life, except in limited instances. Furthermore, the Taliban prohibited all doctors from treating female patients in the absence of a patient's husband, father, or brother. This decree, while not universally enforced, made treatment extremely difficult for Kabul's widows, many of whom had lost all their male family members.

On July 6, 2000, the Taliban issued an edict banning women's employment (except in the health care sector) in U.N. agencies and international NGO's. On August 16, 2000, the Taliban issued an order closing down the World Food Program's (WFP) 25 widows' bakeries. However, the Taliban reversed the edict the next day after the WFP stated that the female staff of the bakeries were not direct employees of the WFP and therefore not subject to the edict. In June 2001, the bakeries again were closed due to an impasse between the Taliban and the WFP over the WFP's attempt to hire women to conduct a beneficiary survey. A compromise was reached in which the Taliban permitted the WFP to hire women through the Ministry of Public Health and allowed the bakeries to reopen. Since the fall of the Taliban,

there have been no such restrictions on women's movement or employment.

Under the Taliban, in public women were required to don a head-to-toe garment known as the burqa, which only has a mesh screen for vision. Most women in rural areas traditionally wore burqas; however, many urban women did not wear burqas before the Taliban imposed this practice. During the period covered by this report, the Taliban reportedly did ease some of the restrictions on women's dress. After the fall of the Taliban, women were no longer required to wear burqas, although many continue to choose to do so.

According to Taliban regulations, men's beards were required to protrude farther than would a fist clamped at the base of the chin. Men also needed to wear head coverings and could not have long hair. All students at Kabul University reportedly were required to have beards in order to study there. However, there have been no such restrictions on men's appearance since the fall of the Taliban.

In May 2001, according to news reports, the Taliban was considering an edict requiring Hindus to wear identifying badges on their clothing. On May 23, 2001, Taliban radio announced that the edict had been approved by religious officials; however, Mullah Omar reportedly did not sign the edict and the Taliban did not implement it before the regime fell. The Taliban stated that the intent of the proposed edict was to protect Hindu citizens from harassment by members of the religious police. However, international observers regarded the proposed edict as part of the Taliban's efforts to segregate and isolate non-Muslim citizens, and to encourage more Hindu migration. The reactions of Hindu citizens reportedly ranged from indifference to outrage.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The Taliban reportedly had committed numerous human rights violations, particularly against the Hazaras. For example, in the recent past, the Taliban committed mass killings of the mainly Shi'a Hazaras particularly in the north. Although the conflict between the Hazaras and the Taliban was political and military as well as religious, and it is not possible to state with certainty that the Taliban engaged in its campaign of persecution against the Shi'a solely because of their religious beliefs, the religious affiliation of the Hazaras reportedly was a significant factor leading to their repression by the Taliban. In January 2001, several NGO's reported that the Taliban massacred several hundred Shi'a civilians in Yakaolang in the center of the country. The massacre reportedly occurred after the Taliban recaptured the area from opposition forces. According to witnesses interviewed by Human Rights Watch (HRW), after the Taliban recaptured the area, they rounded up victims from the surrounding villages, and shot or stabbed them with bayonets in the town center.

Although the conflict between the Pashtuns and other tribal sects was political and military as well as religious, it was not possible to state with certainty that ethnic tribes engaged in widespread violence solely because of their religious beliefs, although the religious affiliation of the Pashtuns apparently was a factor leading to their repression. In the period covered by this report, there were reports of widespread violence against ethnic Pashtuns, including extrajudicial killings, beatings, sexual violence, and destruction of property. This ongoing campaign of violence, according to HRW, has forced thousands of Pashtuns to leave their villages. These attacks are believed to be carried out in reprisal for perceived support given to the Taliban in the northern section of the country by local Pashtuns. The Taliban was dominated by Pashtuns from Kandahar and other southern provinces, and its forces were implicated in mass killings, destruction of homes, and other serious abuses against non-Pashtun communities in the north between 1997 and 2001.

The Taliban ruled strictly in areas that it controlled, establishing ad hoc and rudimentary judicial systems. The Taliban established Islamic courts to judge criminal cases and to resolve disputes. The courts reportedly dealt with all complaints, relying on the Taliban's interpretation of Islamic law and punishments as well as tribal customs. In cases involving murder and rape, convicted prisoners generally were ordered to be executed, although relatives of the victim could instead choose to accept another form of restitution. Decisions of the courts reportedly were final. Taliban courts imposed their extreme interpretation of Islamic law and punishments following swift summary trials. Murderers were subjected to public executions, which sometimes took place before crowds of up to 30,000 persons at Kabul Stadium. Executions sometimes were carried out by throat slitting, a punishment that, at times, was inflicted by the victims' families. Thieves were subjected to public amputations of either one hand or one foot, or both. The U.N. Special Rapporteur for Torture noted particular concern about the use of amputation as a form of punishment by Taliban authorities. Adulterers were stoned to death or publicly whipped with 100 lashes. According to HRW in 1999, several men who were found guilty of homosexual acts were crushed by having walls toppled over them by a tank; one man who survived the ordeal after being left under the rubble for two hours reportedly was allowed to go free. There were no reports that homosexuals were punished in such a manner during the period covered by this report.

The Taliban sought to impose its extreme interpretation of Islamic observance in any many areas as it could and declared that all Muslims in areas under its control had to abide by the Taliban's interpretation of Islamic law. The Taliban announced its proclamations and edicts through broadcasts on the Taliban's "Radio Shariat," and relied on a religious police force under the control of the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice to enforce rules regarding appearance, dress, employment, access to medical care, behavior, religious practice, and freedom of expression. Members of the religious police, which was raised to the status of a Ministry in May 1998, were regularly supposed to check persons on the street in order to ascertain that individuals were conforming to such Taliban edicts. Persons found to be in violation of the edicts were subject to punishment meted out on the spot, which included beatings, detention, or both. In practice, the rigid policies adopted both by the Taliban and by certain opposition groups affected adversely adherents of other forms of Islam and of other faiths. Enforcement of Taliban

social strictures was erratic; Taliban edicts generally were enforced in cities, especially in Kabul, and were enforced less consistently in rural areas, where more was left to local custom.

The Taliban's extreme interpretation and implementation of Shari'a (Islamic law) had a particularly harmful effect on women. In Kabul and elsewhere, women found in public who were not wearing a burqa, or whose burqas did not cover their ankles properly, frequently were beaten by members of the religious police. Some poor women could not afford the cost of a burqa, and thus were forced to remain at home or risk beatings if they went out without one. Some women who could not afford to buy burqas were unable to access necessary medical care. In a 1998 survey, Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) found that 22 percent of the female respondents surveyed reported being detained and abused by the Taliban; of these incidents, 72 percent were related to alleged infractions of the Taliban's dress code for women. Most of these incidents reportedly resulted in detentions that lasted 1 hour or less, but 84 percent also resulted in public beatings, and 2 percent resulted in torture. Sixty-eight percent of those surveyed reported that they had reduced their public activities drastically during 1998 in Kabul.

Due to religious interpretation imposed by the Taliban, women were expected to leave their homes only while escorted by a male relative, further curtailing the appearance and movement of women in public even while wearing approved clothing. Women who appeared in public without a male relative risked being beaten by members of the religious police. Women were not allowed to drive, and taxi drivers reportedly were beaten if they took unescorted women as passengers.

When the Taliban captured Kabul in 1996, it immediately issued pronouncements forbidding women to work, including female doctors and nurses in hospitals. In a few cases, the Taliban had allowed women to work in health care occupations under restricted circumstances. Amnesty International reported that thousands of women around the country were laid off in April 2000. The prohibition on women working outside of the home was especially difficult for the large numbers of widows left by over 20 years of civil war; there were an estimated 30,000 widows in Kabul alone. Many women reportedly were reduced to selling all of their possessions and to begging to feed their families. Taliban gender restrictions also interfered with the delivery of humanitarian assistance to women and girls. Male relatives were required to obtain the permission of the religious police for female home-based employment.

Restrictions on women's employment also affected women working in international NGO's. In June 2001, the religious police arrested four female employees of the World Food Program because they were not accompanied by a male family member. The women were released after spending 2 nights in jail. Also in June 2001, an Italian-funded hospital in Kabul was forced to close temporarily to protect female staff from local religious police.

While most citizens lacked any access to adequate medical facilities, such access was made even more restrictive for women under the religious strictures imposed by Taliban rule.

The Taliban's religiously-based restrictions on medical treatment by male health professionals had a detrimental effect on children. According to PHR, children sometimes were denied medical care when the authorities did not let male doctors visit children's wards, which might be located within the women's ward of a hospital, or did not allow male doctors to see children who were accompanied only by their mothers.

In March 2001, the Taliban destroyed two giant pre-Islamic Buddha statues carved into cliffs in Bamiyan province, on the grounds that statues are idolatrous and insulting to Islam. The Taliban destroyed the 2,000-year-old statues despite appeals from the United Nations, international NGO's, and the world community, including many Muslim countries.

No information was available on the number of religious detainees or prisoners.

The Northern Alliance controlled much less territory than the Taliban and therefore affected a smaller percentage of the population. However, some groups within the Northern Alliance also were dedicated to enforcing strict adherence to Shari'a law. In past years, some members of the Northern Alliance were responsible for atrocities against Taliban forces during the war for control of the country.

The Ismaili community fought for the Northern Alliance against the Taliban and suffered when the Taliban occupied territories once held by Ismaili forces.

Under the Taliban, conversion from Islam was considered apostasy and punishable by death. According to a Taliban decree issued in June 2001, proselytizing by non-Muslims was prohibited, and was punishable by death or deportation in the case of foreigners. Taliban officials subsequently stated that the decree only was a guideline. A small number of foreign Christian groups were allowed in the country to provide humanitarian assistance; however, they were forbidden by the Taliban to proselytize. On August 3, 2001 Dayna Curry and Heather Mercer were arrested by the Taliban along with 22 others for their work with Shelter Now, a Christian aid organization based in Germany. The Taliban also seized Bibles and videos and audio tapes from the members of the group. The workers were tried for violating the Taliban prohibition against proselytizing. On November 15, 2001 Dayna Curry and Heather Mercer were freed by Operation Enduring Freedom forces, after the Taliban had fled Kabul. In the period covered by this report, there was no information available about converts from Islam, and no information available concerning restrictions on the training of clergy.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The fall of the Taliban and the subsequent establishment of the AIA and the ITGA resulted in a major improvement in religious freedom. Sikh and Hindu representatives at the Emergency Loya Jirga in June 2002 reported that they no longer were repressed and felt free to practice their religions. Taliban policies and laws have been replaced by the Bonn Agreement and the 1964 Constitution, and work on new laws and regulations under the Judicial and Constitutional Agreements mandated by the Bonn Agreement was to begin in 2002. The newly created Human Rights Commission is to address problems of bringing to justice those responsible for past abuses. The Government has stressed reconciliation and cooperation among all citizens during its existence both as an Interim and then as a Transitional Authority. Although the Government primarily is concerned with ethnic reconciliation, it also is concerned about religious tolerance. The AIA and ATA responded positively to all international approaches on human rights, including religious freedom. During the period covered by this report, the AIA had one Shi'a Hazara Vice President and four Shia Hazara ministers in the cabinet. In addition, within the current ITGA structure, Vice-President Khalili, Habiba Sarabi, Minister for Women's Affairs, and Dr. Sima Samar, the Chair of the Human Rights Commission are all Shi'a Hazara.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

Relations between the different branches of Islam in the country have been difficult. Historically, the minority Shi'a faced discrimination from the majority Sunni population. Most Shi'a Muslims are members of the Hazara ethnic group, which traditionally has been segregated from the rest of society for a combination of political, ethnic, and religious reasons. Throughout the country's history, there have been many examples of conflicts between the Hazaras and other citizens. These conflicts often have had economic and political roots but also have acquired religious dimensions.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

Until December 2001, the U.S. Government did not maintain an official presence in the country. This lack of diplomatic representation limited the U.S. Government's ability to take action to promote religious freedom. However, since October 2001, the U.S. government has discussed religious freedom issues with Afghan officials in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

Since October 2001, the U.S. and international coalition forces have worked with Afghan opposition representatives to create the Bonn Agreement in December 2001 and thereby the Afghan Interim Authority. The U.S. has worked with the AIA and the subsequent ITGA in the months since to promote human rights and religious and ethnic tolerance, from the inclusion of minority groups in the Government and military to assistance in the reconstruction of the country and its legal and political processes. Embassy representatives meet daily with ITGA officials, and routinely with religious and minority figures, in an ongoing dialog regarding the political, legal, religious, and human rights context of the country's reconstruction.

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