

Afghanistan - Aimaq

 minorityrights.org/minorities/aimaq/

June 19, 2015



Profile

It is estimated that there are 480,000 Aimaq people (Ethnologue 1993) living on the steppe land in north-west Afghanistan. Aimaq origins may be traced to a group of tribes, the Char Aimaq, who are spread around Afghanistan and Iran. They are a subgroup of the Turkish population and most of them have Mongoloid features. They claim to be the ancestors of Genghis Khan's soldiers. There are several different subgroups that belong in the same family of tribes including the Taimani, Firozkohi, Jamshidi and Hazara.

The Aimaq are mostly Sunni Muslim of the Hanafi branch, like the Pashtuns, Tajiks, Uzbeks and the Turkmen of Afghanistan. They speak a dialect of Persian mixed with Turkic vocabulary. While the Aimaq have traditionally been a nomadic people, they are gradually becoming semi-nomadic, traveling only in certain seasons. Their societal structure is based on the patriarchal nucleus family, which also defines their ethnic identity. Their main economic resource is carpet-weaving and, on a secondary basis, farming. Lacking in rich agricultural land some of them were nonetheless forced to choose to become farmers due to the drought in the 1950s and 1960s. Despite the main source of economic wealth resulting from carpet-weaving, Aimaq culture still measures wealth through the number of heads of animal herds.

Historical context

Being a nomadic people, the Aimaq, divided into their different sub-groupings have traditionally traversed through the entirety of Afghanistan and Iran. They are credited with participation in the defence of the state against the Soviet invasion, as well as being active in the ensuing civil war, on the side of the Mujahadin. Being a relatively small though diverse group with no real territorial base, there has not been any claim from the Aimaq for self-determination. Their tribal and nomadic character has acted as a barrier from them ever becoming politically active, nor have they sought administrative power in any concerted manner. As a result they have lacked

the means through which to communicate their main very fundamental concern of survival under very difficult conditions.

In contrast with other communities in rural Afghanistan, Aimaq women are accorded high status; and they are able to participate in group discussions with outsiders present, and have some degree of choice over whom they marry.

Current issues

A decade after the overthrow of the Taliban, Afghanistan remains one of the poorest countries in the world and is still going through a political, social and economic transition. The current constitution (2004), established after the Bonn Agreement (2001) protects all minorities and urges the state to adopt an equal and non-discriminatory participation in the governmental, social, economic and political processes of the country. However, there has been a lack of information on the situation of the Aimaq in Afghan politics and society since its implementation.