

Aimaq

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 *Mujahadeen*. 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.

Current issues

With Afghanistan just having emerged from years of struggle, civil war and oppressive administration by the Taliban regime it remains one of the poorest countries in the world, facing a political, social and economic transition that is still shrouded in uncertainty. The Aimaq, as are all the small grouping of tribal ethnic groups in Afghanistan, are still trying to find their place in the newly established state. The current constitution (2003), 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, it remains too early to draw any conclusions on the stability and application of the new political status in the country.