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23 December 2011

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Afghanistan: Situation of Afghan citizens who work for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or international aid organizations; whether they are targeted by the Taliban; attacks against schools and incidents of violence against students, teachers, and the educational sector

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Afghans employed by NGOs or aid organizations

Sources indicate that there are dozens of international and local aid organizations operating in Afghanistan (ACBAR n.d.; The Afghanistan Analyst n.d.). The Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief lists over 80 member organizations active in relief efforts (n.d.). Both governmental aid agencies and NGOs employ Afghan staff members (Aga Khan Foundation et al. 2010, 12; US n.d.). For example, according to a report co-authored by six international NGOs (the Aga Khan Foundation, CARE, Catholic Relief Services, the International Rescue Committee, Mercy Corps, and Save the Children), their Afghan operations serve 6,000 communities in 24 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces and are staffed with 5,380 Afghan employees, accounting for 98 percent of their overall staff (Aga Khan Foundation et al. 2010, 12). The United States Agency for International Development (USAID), says that it employed over 20,000 Afghan citizens in 2008 (US n.d.).

Targeting of NGO and aid workers

Several sources report that the Taliban and other insurgents target people who work for NGOs (UN and AIHRC Mar. 2011, iii; Action Aid et al. 19 Nov. 2010, 10; AI Oct. 2011, 6). According to a joint report by the United Nations (UN) Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, Afghanistan's national human rights institution, insurgents targeted aid and development workers in both international and national NGOs "through killings, abductions or other intimidation tactics" (UN and AIHRC Mar. 2011, iii).

Sources indicate that the number of violent incidents against NGO workers in Afghanistan has been increasing (Oxfam 19 Nov. 2010, 10; UN 2011, Sec. 2.1; ANSO July 2011, 1). In fact, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reports that there were approximately 170 "major attacks" against aid workers in Afghanistan between 2005 and 2010, more than in any other country in the world (UN 2011, Sec. 2.1). According to the Afghanistan NGO Safety Office

(ANSO), an organization that provides advice and analysis to humanitarians and that is supported by the European Commission, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the increasing violence against NGO workers is set "against the backdrop of intense conflict, a proliferation of irregular forces, political uncertainty and rising armed crime" (July 2011, 1).

Statistics of attacks against NGOs

ANSO, which collects and analyzes data on NGO security incidents such as explosions, rocket attacks, small arms fire, abductions and armed robbery (July 2011, 4), reports that, in 2010, there were 126 incidents affecting NGO workers (2011, 1). The incidents resulted in the deaths of 28 people and the injury of another 33 (ANSO 2011, 1). Of the 28 deaths, 8 were foreigners and 20 were Afghan citizens; 22 were the result of armed opposition groups, 3 were attributed to criminals and 3 were the result of collateral damage between warring groups (ibid.). While these figures reflect a 27 percent drop in the total number of incidents from 2009, they also show a 42 percent increase in fatalities (ibid.). In contrast, however, the US Department of State's *Country Reports on Terrorism 2010* reports that nearly 100 humanitarian aid workers were killed in Afghanistan in 2010 (18 Aug. 2011). According to the UN Security Council, in 2010, 80 aid workers were abducted in 32 incidents, an increase from the 49 aid-worker abductions in 2009 (3 Feb. 2011, para. 53).

ANSO, reporting only on the first half of 2011, indicates that incidents against aid workers increased 73 percent over that of the same period in 2010 (July 2011, 1). During the January to June period, 13 NGO workers were killed, 24 were wounded, and "many dozens" were abducted (ANSO July 2011, 1). There was also an increase in the number of incidents affecting NGOs in comparison to overall security incidents (ibid., 5).

Targeting by criminal groups

In addition to insurgents, sources indicate that criminal groups also target NGO workers (UN 4 Oct. 2010; Freedom House 2011; ANSO July 2011, 5). The UN's Integrated Regional Information Networks notes that in areas where neither the government nor the Taliban are in full control, aid workers face "serious risks" of abduction, theft, and other attacks by armed criminals (UN 4 Oct. 2010). The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs explains that criminal groups that abduct NGO workers either demand ransom from the victim's family or organization, or sell the victim to insurgents (UN 2011, Sec. 2.1). ANSO reports that in the first half of 2011, there were 26 security incidents against NGOs committed by criminals, while there were 14 such incidents in the first half of 2010 (July 2011, 3). ANSO explains that the rise of criminally motivated attacks against NGOs is related to the expansion of criminal networks in northern Afghanistan (July 2011, 3). The UN Security Council reports that in March of 2009, 13 aid convoys, including one belonging to the UN, were attacked and looted by armed groups, some of which "might have been criminal groups" (3 Feb. 2011, 14).

Location of incidents

According to ANSO statistics, attacks against NGO workers have occurred in all regions of Afghanistan (July 2011, 4). Attacks took place in provinces considered relatively safe or with a small number of insurgents as well as in

provinces deemed insecure or with a large number of insurgents (ANSO 2011, 7). Specifically, in the first half of 2011, ANSO reports the regional location of violent incidents (including explosions, rocket attacks, small arms fire, abductions and armed robbery) against NGOs as follows:

| Region | Percentage |
|---------|------------|
| Central | 36% |
| East | 31% |
| West | 16% |
| North | 13% |

(ANSO July 2011, 4)

ANSO explains that incidents against NGOs in the "Greater North" have increased due to the expansion of armed opposition groups and criminal groups in the area (ibid.).

Security and other concerns

In 2010, the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR), an international NGO that promotes local journalism in high-conflict areas (n.d.), stated that in Kapisa province, development workers, particularly local ones, were "likely to be intimidated, abducted or murdered" because of the large presence of the Taliban (9 Nov. 2010). However, the IWPR also noted that some development projects in Kapisa met with the Taliban's approval, and were able to proceed peacefully (9 Nov. 2010.).

Several sources note that NGOs could not operate in many areas of Afghanistan because of security concerns (UN and AIHRC Mar. 2011, 20; Oxfam 19 Nov. 2010, 10; IDMC 11 Apr. 2011, 8-9). According to the UN Security Council, the UN has characterized large parts of the south, southeast, east, west, northwest and central regions of Afghanistan as either "high risk" or "very high risk" for aid agencies (UN 3 Feb. 2011, para. 51). Amnesty International notes that NGOs have limited or no access to areas controlled by the Taliban or other insurgency groups (Oct. 2011, 6).

In addition to security concerns, the International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) explains that there are donor-imposed funding rules that prevent many aid organizations from providing benefits to insurgents or their affiliates (4 Aug. 2011, 22). The Crisis Group also notes that aid organizations are unable to access a growing number of villages (4 Aug. 2011, 23). Oxfam, in a report endorsed by 28 other NGOs active in the country, expressed concern that the deteriorating security conditions in Afghanistan have prevented aid agencies from reaching many of the most vulnerable people (Oxfam 19 Nov. 2010).

The IWPR indicates that the Taliban will sometimes attack projects perceived to be affiliated with the Afghan government or international agencies (9 Nov. 2010). According to the UN Security Council, the Taliban has issued public statements that threaten anyone who supports the government, including the UN (3 Feb. 2011, para. 52). However, ANSO maintains that the decision to attack NGOs is not part of a national policy of the Taliban (ANSO July 2011, 5; ibid. Apr. 2011, 1), but is one made at the local level (ibid. July 2011, 5) or is the

result of "an increase in ambient violence" (ibid. Apr. 2011, 1).

Attacks against NGOs and international aid agencies

High-profile Taliban attacks against workers of international aid organizations include an "ambush" of International Rescue Committee workers on 13 August 2008 in Logar province (Pajhwok Afghan News 13 Aug. 2008; IRC 14 Aug. 2008; BBC 13 Aug. 2008). The Taliban killed four people, including an Afghan employee, in the attack (ibid.; Pajhwok Afghan News 13 Aug. 2008; IRC 14 Aug. 2008). In August 2010, the Taliban killed 10 medical aid workers, including two Afghans, in the northern province of Badakhshan (*The Christian Science Monitor* 7 Aug. 2010; *The New York Times* 7 Aug. 2010). In both cases, the Taliban claimed responsibility for the attacks and accused the NGO workers of being "spies" (Pajhwok Afghan News 13 Aug. 2008; IRC 14 Aug. 2008; BBC 13 Aug. 2008; *The Christian Science Monitor* 7 Aug. 2010; *The New York Times* 7 Aug. 2010). In the case of the Badakhshan attack, they also accused the NGO workers of proselytizing Christianity (ibid.; *The Christian Science Monitor* 7 Aug. 2010).

There have also been attacks by insurgents against UN agencies operating in Afghanistan (UN 23 June 2011, para. 4; RFE/RL 31 Oct. 2011; START 23 Oct. 2010). Media sources report that, on 31 October 2011, in Kandahar, three workers for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) were killed and two were wounded in a suicide bombing for which the Taliban claimed responsibility (RFE/RL 31 Oct. 2011; *Los Angeles Times* 1 Nov. 2011; *The Times of Central Asia* 1 Nov. 2011). Sources also report that, on 1 April 2011, three of the UN Assistance Mission's international staff were killed, along with four international security guards, when a protest turned violent and the UN compound in Mazar-e-Sharif was attacked (UN 23 June 2011, para. 4; BBC 1 Apr. 2011; *The Telegraph* 1 Apr. 2011). In October 2010, there was also a Taliban attack against the UN Assistance Mission in Herat, although there were no injuries among UN staff (VOA 23 Oct. 2010; START 23 Oct. 2010; see also UN 23 June 2011, para. 4).

The Geneva-based Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre reports that there have been a large number of "small-scale displacements" of Afghan citizens as a result of the Taliban intimidating and killing specific civilians including, among others, Afghan and international NGO workers and teachers (11 Apr. 2011, 4). According to the monitoring centre, the Taliban hostilities have largely occurred in the southeast, south and central regions of Afghanistan (11 Apr. 2011, 4).

Attacks against schools and school closures

Several sources report that insurgents have attacked, set fire to, and forced the closure of schools in Afghanistan (IWPR 8 Apr. 2011; Oxfam 19 Nov. 2010, 9; AI Oct. 2011, 6). Attacks against schools have included rocket attacks, bombings, arson, and threats (ibid.; UN 3 Feb. 2011, para. 42-43). Sources also note that the placement of security forces near schools has increased military actions and affected schools, students and teachers (ibid., para. 44; IWPR 30 Mar. 2011).

Approximately 500 Afghan schools reportedly remain closed because of security threats (UN 12 Sept. 2011; AI Oct. 2011, 6). According to Amnesty International, between April and December of 2010, insurgents either destroyed or forced the closure of 74 schools in Afghanistan -- 26 girls' schools, 13 boys'

schools, and 35 co-ed schools (ibid.). Sources indicate that the schools affected are primarily in the south (ibid.; UN 3 Feb. 2011, para. 42); however, the UN Security Council notes that attacks against schools have also happened in the northern provinces, such as Takhar and Badakhshan, in the provinces of Wardak, Logar and Khost (provinces that surround Kabul), in Kabul, and in the eastern provinces of Laghman, Kunar and Nangarhar (ibid.). Reporting on the period between 1 September 2008 and 30 August 2010, the Security Council notes that while the majority of incidents against schools were carried out by armed opposition groups, including the Taliban, there were also some incidents that were perpetrated by other local actors who oppose girls' education (ibid.). However, the IWPR reports that some schools in Taliban-controlled areas have been able to reopen after village elders negotiated with Taliban members (8 Apr. 2011).

Targeted attacks against students and teachers

Several sources report that insurgents have targeted students and teachers (UN and AIHRC Mar. 2011, 12; UN 3 Feb. 2011, para. 42-43; IWPR 8 Apr. 2011; ACBAR 7 Oct. 2011). The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission state that, in 2010, anti-government groups were responsible for the assassinations of at least 21 students, teachers, and other educational staff (UN and AIHRC Mar. 2011, 12). According to the 2010 Oxfam report, threats to students and staff have been increasing (19 Nov. 2010, 9).

The Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief reports that students, particularly girls, have been kidnapped and harassed in Herat, Nangarhar and Kandahar (7 Oct. 2011, 5). The relief agency also maintains that the staff of educational institutions are targeted and harassed by both insurgents and criminal groups in the communities (7 Oct. 2011, 5).

Sources report several cases in which poisonous gas was released inside girls' schools, causing students and teachers to become ill (IWPR 10 Sept. 2010; START 25 Aug. 2010; ibid. 11 June 2010). In 2009 and 2010, these attacks reportedly occurred in the following locations:

- Kabul (START 25 Aug. 2010; ibid. 4 May 2010; IWPR 10 Sept. 2010);
- Ghazni (ibid.; START 11 June 2010);
- Kunduz [a.k.a. Kondo, Kunduz] (ibid. 11 May 2010; Pajhwok Afghan News 11 May 2011; IWPR 10 Sept. 2010); and
- Parwan, Sar-e Pol, Balkh, Kandahar, and Kapisa (ibid.).

According to the US Department of Homeland Security's START, the National Consortium Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, which is based at the University of Maryland and maintains a database with information on terrorist incidents around the world (2010, 1, 7), on 25 August 2010, a chemical gas released at a girls' school in Kabul caused 46 students and nine teachers to go to the hospital (25 Aug. 2010), while an earlier attack on a Kabul girls' school on 4 May 2010 led to the hospitalization of 22 students and three teachers (4 May 2010). The Kabul-based Pajhwok Afghan News agency reports that there were three poisonous gas attacks at girls' schools in Kunduz, causing some students to become unconscious and to be hospitalized in "critical condition" (11 May 2010). In September 2010, the IWPR stated that the poisonous gas attacks on schools caused some victims to faint or become dizzy

and nauseous, but that there were no deaths (10 Sept. 2010). The Taliban reportedly denied responsibility for the attacks (IWPR 10 Sept. 2010) and condemned the incident (Pajhwok Afghan News 11 May 2010).

Other attacks against students and teachers have been reported by several sources (UN 3 Feb. 2011, para. 43, 46; START 3 Feb. 2010). START reports that on 3 February 2010, armed assailants believed to be affiliated with the Taliban attacked and wounded one Afghan teacher and kidnapped two others in Dowlatabad, Faryab (3 Feb. 2010). The UN Security Council indicates that, in November 2008, the Taliban attacked several girls with acid, causing serious injuries (UN 3 Feb. 2011, para. 46). The girls were en route to school in the Mirwais Mena district of Kandahar province when they were attacked (ibid.). The Taliban also attacked and assaulted 15 students at a teacher-training institute in Uruzgan province, warning them to no longer attend the training (ibid., para. 43). Pajhwok Afghan News reports that a male teacher was shot dead by motorcyclists believed to be affiliated with the Taliban in Helmand province in December 2008 (18 Dec. 2008).

Attacks against Afghans affiliated with education-sector NGOs

Several sources provide details of cases in which Afghan citizens working for NGOs in the education sector were killed, harmed or intimidated by the Taliban (START 26 Mar. 2010; IWPR 9 Nov. 2010; RFE/RL 30 Aug. 2011). In one case, in March 2010, an assailant killed one Afghan aid worker and wounded three or four others who were inspecting a high school in Khost as part of their work for a German aid organization (START 26 Mar. 2010; AP 26 Mar. 2010). In another example, the IWPR reports that a professor of literature and linguistics at a university in Kapisa was abducted by the Taliban because he gave an NGO-funded training course; he was released after his family raised the ransom money (IWPR 9 Nov. 2010). In another case, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty reports that the founder of a small NGO that provides job-skills training to impoverished and disabled women received death threats from the Taliban (RFE/RL 30 Aug. 2011). According to the victim, he was accused of being an agent for the US because his organization received some funding from the local Provincial Reconstruction Team (ibid.). The Taliban wanted him to either shut down his NGO or use his vehicle to transport their weapons and wounded fighters, but he refused (ibid.).

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.

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