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AFG42059.E

01 October 2003

Afghanistan: Identity documents carried by Afghan citizens; ease or difficulty in obtaining these documents

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa

Tazkara (Taskera)

The Afghan identity document called the *tazkara* (*taskera*) was discussed in detail most recently in AFG40753.E of 4 December 2002. Please also consult AFG29678.E of 14 July 1998, AFG28173.E of 27 November 1997 and AFG27853.E of 21 November 1997 for information relating to *tazkara* issued before 2001, which Afghan citizens may currently use as identification. Additional information published since December 2002 is limited; however, the Danish Immigration Service (DIS) reported in March 2003 that since the end of the Taliban period, the Afghan authorities have been issuing a new form instead of the previously issued identity forms because they have run out of the latter (Denmark Mar. 2003, 55). The Research Directorate did not find a description of the new form or reports indicating that the Interim Islamic Administration of Afghanistan (IIAA) was intending to replace older *tazkara* with these new forms among the sources consulted.

Citizens can obtain a *tazkara* from the Ministry of Interior in Kabul, provincial governors in the provinces, a "District Commissioner" in the Afghan districts or at embassies abroad by showing a birth certificate or having another person certify their identity (ibid., 54).

Passports

According to the first secretary at the Afghan Embassy in Islamabad, Pakistan, Afghan authorities issue six types of passports, including diplomatic, service, trade, student, Hajj passports (only valid in connection with a pilgrimage) and ordinary nationality passports (Denmark 10 Sept. 2002). The IIAA recently invalidated Afghan passports issued by Taliban authorities between September 1996 and October 2001, but upheld the validity of those issued by the Northern Alliance during this period and those issued before and after the Taliban rule (US 3 Apr. 2003). The DIS noted, however, that, "if the Taliban passport was provided with a valid visa to another country, such a passport will not be replaced with a new one ... until the expiry of the visa in question" (10 Sept. 2002).

In their September 2002 fact-finding mission report, DIS noted the following with regard to the issuance of passports:

Diplomatic passports and service passports are only issued in Kabul by the Foreign Ministry, while trade passports, student passports and Hajj passports can be issued by local authorities in Afghanistan. Ordinary nationality passports can also be issued at Afghan representations outside

Afghanistan.

Every Afghan citizen will be able to apply to the passport issuing authorities [for] an Afghan nationality passport.

When applying for an Afghan nationality passport, the applicant should ... visit the passport issuing authorities in person to fill in an application form. Identity documents should be presented in this connection, for example an Afghan ID card (*tazkara*) or a previous passport. The first secretary [of the Afghan embassy in Islamabad, Pakistan] stated that the majority of the Afghan population possess ID documents.... If a person does not possess ID documents, [he or she] can bring witnesses who will be able to confirm the applicant's Afghan identity. A passport applicant should also document good knowledge of Afghan affairs, including geographical conditions. The applicant is interviewed in this connection when submitting the passport application.

The first secretary told the delegation that in some cases a refugee card issued by the Pakistan authorities could be accepted as documentation of a passport applicant's Afghan identity.

In connection with the issuing of an Afghan nationality passport at the representations in Pakistan, a fee of USD 104 is charged, while it costs USD 100 to renew a passport. The money should be paid to an account in a Pakistani bank before the passport can be issued. A passport can be issued in 3-4 days from the time of application. At the Afghan embassy in Islamabad, 15-20 passports are issued per day to Afghan citizens.

The director for DACAAR stated that passports are issued in Kabul over a 5-day period from the time of application and the price for a passport in Kabul is less than 2,000 Pakistani rupees (approx USD 30-35). The first secretary stated that the issuing procedures are the same at the embassy in Islamabad and at the consulates in Peshawar, Karachi and Quetta (DIS 10 Sept. 2002).

In their December fact finding mission report to Afghanistan, the DIS added that an applicant may have his or her name compared against a criminal records register, but the report did not mention what would occur should the applicant be found with a criminal background (ibid. Mar. 2003, 54). In an effort to prevent young men from fleeing abroad and avoiding their compulsory military service, in September 2002 the Afghan Ministry of Defence ordered the Interior Ministry's passport office to not issue passports to men between 22 and 28 years of age (IWPR 27 Sept. 2002).

Exit Visas

Afghans are required to have visas to pass into Pakistan (*Dawn* 17 July 2003), Turkmenistan (IRIN 30 July 2003) and Iran (*Tehran Times* 23 July 2003). On 17 July 2003, *Dawn* reported that security along the Afghan-Pakistan frontier had been stepped up because of the infiltration of Afghans into Pakistan and "all permits issued to people on both sides" of the border were cancelled. However, an August 2003 report opined that parts of the Pakistani border were essentially meaningless and not respected by locals, meaning that neither Pakistani nor Afghan officials can stop the flow of people and goods from crossing the border (*Asia Times* 26 Aug. 2003). Indeed, the article notes, attempts by the government to restrict movement with a visa regime "became a laughing stock on both sides of the border" (ibid.).

Voluntary Repatriation Forms

Since 2002, the UNHCR has been issuing Voluntary Repatriation Forms (VRF) to refugees voluntarily returning to Afghanistan from third countries (UNIC 4 Feb. 2002;

UNHCR 3 Apr. 2002; Islamic Republic of Iran et al. 3 Apr. 2002; see also UN OCHA 25 Apr. 2002). A UNHCR description of these forms indicates that the head of household would retain at least one copy of the VRF form after repatriation (15 Mar. 2003). According to an agreement signed between Iran, the IIAA and the UNHCR, VFRs that are duly completed by the UNHCR are "valid identity documents and travel documents for the purpose of return to final destinations in Afghanistan" (Islamic Republic of Iran et al. 3 Apr. 2002).

Other Identity Documents

The US Department of State reported that Afghan citizens may have birth certificates issued by some hospitals and from local authorities, marriage certificates issued by the courts as a white booklet the provides information on the bride and groom and, in some cases divorce decrees issued by the courts (US 3 Apr. 2003). However, according to the Deputy Minister of Justice, more than half of all marriages are concluded without the involvement of authorities, meaning that there would be no marriage certificate (Denmark Mar. 2003, 56).

Reliability of Afghan Documents

According to the US Department of State (DOS) Visa Reciprocity and Country Documents Finder report on Afghanistan dated 3 April 2003, the availability and reliability of Afghan identity documents is "very uncertain" because of wartime conditions and a lack of a central authority. Moreover, during the 1990s, Afghan refugees who fled to Pakistan were generally not registered or issued with identity documents (AREU Dec. 2002).

The Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees (DCAAR) stated that there is widespread circulation of false documentation in Afghanistan, including university examination certificates and, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) office in Kabul, false Afghan passports (Denmark Mar. 2003, 54). In late 2001, a news report regarding the escape of Osama Bin Laden's elite soldiers from Afghanistan following US intervention detailed the availability of fraudulent Afghan identity and travel documents in Peshawar and other Afghan towns (*Times of India* 29 Oct. 2001). According to the report, travel visas were available for US\$4,000 (ibid). *Newsweek* reporters purchased (in US dollars) a "complete set of fraudulent Afghan documents, including an Afghan passport for \$275, a driver's licence for nine dollars, a Kabul ID card for \$56 and a birth certificate for eight dollars, all in the name of a fictitious 'Mariana Ali'" (ibid.). They also purchased "[t]wo additional documents ... to support a plea for political asylum in the West: a membership card for the now-defunct Afghan Communist party and a letter from Taliban intelligence summoning 'Mariana Ali' for interrogation and demanding that she stop teaching girls English secretly" (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 to refugee status or asylum. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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Relief Web

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World News Connection

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