



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
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CANADA

# **ENDURING AND OVERCOMING: THE STRUGGLE OF THE HAZARAS IN AFGHANISTAN**

**Report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs  
and International Development**

**Ali Ehsassi, Chair**

**Subcommittee on International Human Rights**

**Fayçal El-Khoury, Chair**

**OCTOBER 2024  
44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION**

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### **Reports from committees presented to the House of Commons**

Presenting a report to the House is the way a committee makes public its findings and recommendations on a particular topic. Substantive reports on a subject-matter study usually contain a synopsis of the testimony heard, the recommendations made by the committee, as well as the reasons for those recommendations.

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# **THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

has the honour to present its

## **TWENTY-SEVENTH REPORT**

Pursuant to the motion adopted by the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development on Monday, December 13, 2021, and the motion adopted by the Subcommittee on International Human Rights on Friday, April 28, 2023, the committee has studied the situation of the Hazaras in Afganistan and has agreed to report the following:



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# ENDURING AND OVERCOMING: THE STRUGGLE OF THE HAZARAS IN AFGHANISTAN

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## INTRODUCTION

The Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan in 2021 marked the return of repressive rule to the country and the disappearance of many basic human rights for Afghan people, especially women and girls, and certain minorities.<sup>1</sup> The Hazara people, predominantly Shiite Muslims in a Sunni-majority country, have been particularly impacted. Despite their substantial contributions to Afghanistan's cultural heritage, the Hazaras are currently subjected to significant violence by the Taliban government and extremist groups, including killings and forced evictions.<sup>2</sup> This hostility towards the Hazaras not only underscores their current vulnerability but also reflects the lasting impact of prejudices that were established over a century ago.

In 1891, Abdur Rahman Khan, the Amir of Afghanistan, declared jihad against the Hazaras in response to their resistance to his expansionism. That decree led to the extermination of an estimated 62% of the Hazara population between 1891 and 1893, with survivors stripped of their lands and forced into slavery.<sup>3</sup> The impact of the declaration of jihad has been profound and long-lasting, feeding a pattern in which respite has been overshadowed by recurring periods of oppression.

Given the ongoing struggle of the Hazaras to ensure the survival of their community and uphold their human rights, on 28 April 2023, the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development (the subcommittee), agreed to the following motion:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108 (2), the subcommittee conduct a study about the genocidal actions carried out and commissioned by

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- 1 House of Commons, Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development (SDIR), *Evidence*, 16 June 2023, 1410 (Ali Karimi, Assistant Professor, University of Calgary). Professor Karimi described Afghanistan under the Taliban as a "state of terror."
  - 2 Niamatullah Ibrahim, Melissa Chioyenda, and William Maley, *Genocide of Hazaras in Afghanistan*, Brief submitted to SDIR, 2023.
  - 3 SDIR, *Evidence*, 16 June 2023, 1350 (Mohd Rajabi, As an Individual); SDIR, *Evidence*, 16 June 2023, 1405 (Melissa Kerr Chioyenda, Assistant Professor); SDIR, *Evidence*, 17 October 2023, 1140 (Niamatullah Ibrahim, Senior Lecturer, International Relations, La Trobe University); SDIR, *Evidence*, 24 October 2023, 1220 (Gregory Stanton, President, Genocide Watch).



Abdul Rahman Khan, the Amir of Afghanistan against the Hazara people from 1891 to 1893, wiping out the vast majority of that community; that the study also include the evolution of the human rights situation of the Hazara community; that the subcommittee hold at least two meetings to study the issue; that the findings be reported to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development; and that the subcommittee report to the House.<sup>4</sup>

Between 16 June and 24 October 2023, the subcommittee held three meetings, hearing from academics, civil society representatives, and members of the Hazara community in Canada. The subcommittee also received numerous written briefs. The subcommittee extends its sincere appreciation to all witnesses for sharing their expertise and personal stories, recognizing that doing so often required considerable courage.

While a full review of all the challenges facing the Hazaras was beyond the scope of this study, understanding the root of the persecution and the current lived experiences of the Hazaras is a key first step towards offering valuable support. This report therefore begins with a description of the Hazara people. It then outlines the origins of their systematic persecution and their current plight in Afghanistan. The report concludes with a review of potential actions, as suggested by witnesses, to address the challenges faced by the Hazaras.

## PART I: THE HAZARA PEOPLE

The Hazaras, primarily located in Afghanistan, have a historical connection to the Hazarajat region, located in the central area of Afghanistan, where they maintained autonomy until the late 19th century. While official statistics are unavailable, estimates suggest that the Hazara population in Afghanistan ranges from eight to 10 million, or one quarter of the overall population of Afghanistan.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, significant Hazara communities exist in Pakistan and Iran, with the total Hazara population across these three countries approaching 14 million.<sup>6</sup>

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4 SDIR, *Minutes of Proceedings*, 28 April 2023.

5 World Hazara Council, *A Human Rights Situational Analysis of Ethnic-Hazaras in Afghanistan and Pakistan*, Brief submitted to SDIR, 2023, p. 1.; SDIR, *Evidence*, 24 October 2023, 1220 (Gregory Stanton, President, Genocide Watch).

6 World Hazara Council, *A Human Rights Situational Analysis of Ethnic-Hazaras in Afghanistan and Pakistan*, Brief submitted to SDIR, 2023, p. 1.

Tracing their origins to Turkic-Mongolian ancestry, the Hazaras have significant Central Asian influences.<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, witnesses stated that Hazaras constitute a distinct ethno-religious group.<sup>8</sup> They speak a distinct dialect of Dari or Persian and have a Central Asian appearance, distinguishing them from other Afghan ethnic groups like Pashtuns and Tajiks. They also have unique cultural practices that set them apart from other Afghan ethnicities.<sup>9</sup> While the majority of Hazaras are Shia Muslims, there are also Sunni, Ismaili, and emerging Christian Hazara communities.<sup>10</sup>

Melissa Kerr Chiovenda described the Hazaras in Afghanistan as a group for whom “religion, race and ethnicity are inextricably entwined.”<sup>11</sup> She noted that this leads to a widespread assumption that Hazaras, known for their distinct facial features, are Shia Muslims. She stated that this physical singularity, along with the tendency to follow religious beliefs considered unorthodox by extremist religious groups, have historically led to persistent persecution of the Hazaras.

## PART II: THE FOUNDATIONS OF HAZARA PERSECUTION AND ITS REOCCURENCE

### The Hazara Wars, 1891–1893

Upon assuming the role of Amir of Afghanistan in 1880, Abdur Rahman Khan set out to unify the confederation of independent states that comprised Afghanistan into a single centralized state.<sup>12</sup> When the Hazaras resisted the Amir’s consolidation drive, he labeled them as non-believers, ordering heterodox clergy to issue a fatwa of jihad against them. In this way, Abdur Rahman Khan mobilized not only his army against the Hazaras, but also the larger population. The fatwa decreed that every Muslim should kill Hazaras, seize their property, and enslave them, promising the perpetrators of such crimes spoils

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7 Ibid.; Niamatullah Ibrahim, Melissa Chiovenda, and William Maley, *Genocide of Hazaras in Afghanistan*, Brief submitted to SDIR, 2023; SDIR, [Evidence](#), 16 June 2023, 1500 (Shamim Ahmadi, Settlement Manager, Canadian Hazara Humanitarian Services); SDIR, [Evidence](#), 16 June 2023, 1500 (Ali Karimi, Assistant Professor, University of Calgary).

8 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 17 October 2023, 1105 (Niamatullah Ibrahim, Senior Lecturer, International Relations, La Trobe University); SDIR, [Evidence](#), 16 June 2023, 1405 (Melissa Kerr Chiovenda, Assistant Professor); SDIR, [Evidence](#), 24 October 2023, 1220 (Gregory Stanton, President, Genocide Watch).

9 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 17 October 2023, 1105 (Niamatullah Ibrahim, Senior Lecturer, International Relations, La Trobe University).

10 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 16 June 2023, 1455 (Ali Karimi, Assistant Professor, University of Calgary).

11 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 16 June 2023, 1515 (Melissa Kerr Chiovenda, Assistant Professor).

12 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 16 June 2023, 1410 (Ali Karimi, Assistant Professor, University of Calgary). Professor Karimi described Afghanistan at the time as a “state that barely existed.”





in the form of land and slaves.<sup>13</sup> Word of the fatwa was spread throughout Afghanistan by clerics and religious leaders who were also employed by the state.<sup>14</sup>

Witnesses told the subcommittee that the decree led to the massacre of 62% of the Hazara population in Afghanistan, with almost all Hazaras in Uruzgan province being exterminated.<sup>15</sup> Those who survived faced land dispossession, displacement, and enslavement.<sup>16</sup> Tahir Shaaran summarized the immediate impact of the Amir's campaign as follows:

With over 60% of [the Hazara] population massacred, tens of thousands were sold into slavery and a forced migration reshaped and altered our geography. Approximately 400,000 Hazara families were displaced, with 80% of them either losing their lives or becoming slaves.<sup>17</sup>

Witnesses told the subcommittee that the Amir's jihad saw Hazara men, women and children sold as slaves in the markets of Kabul and Kandahar, an activity authorized and taxed by the state.<sup>18</sup> Mohd Rajabi highlighted that tax records suggest approximately 9,000 women were sold into slavery in Kabul alone.<sup>19</sup> Melissa Kerr Chiovena also emphasized that many Hazara women who were enslaved as spoils of war were subjected to rape and coerced marriages during this period, pointing out that this issue has been largely ignored due to cultural reasons.<sup>20</sup>

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13 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 16 June 2023, 1410 (Ali Karimi, Assistant Professor, University of Calgary).

14 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 17 October 2023, 1105 (Niamatullah Ibrahim, Senior Lecturer, International Relations, La Trobe University).

15 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 16 June 2023, 1350 (Mohd Rajabi, As an Individual); SDIR, [Evidence](#), 16 June 2023, 1405 (Melissa Kerr Chiovena, Assistant Professor).

16 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 16 June 2023, 1405 (Melissa Kerr Chiovena, Assistant Professor); Mohd Rajabi, appearing as an individual, told the subcommittee that Abdur Rahman Khan encouraged other groups to take over Hazara lands and houses, including 6,000 Durrani people from the Kandahar district and 4,000 people from the Ghilzay tribe. The parts of Hazara villages and agricultural lands that were not dispossessed, were destroyed. SDIR, [Evidence](#), 16 June 2023, 1350 (Mohd Rajabi, As an Individual).

17 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 17 October 2023, 1115 (Tahir Shaaran, Canadian Hazara Advocacy Group).

18 Ibid.

19 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 16 June 2023, 1350 (Mohd Rajabi, As an Individual). The slave trade continued under the reign of Khan's son, Habibullah Khan, and extended into his grandson's rule, Ghazi Amanullah Khan persisting until the abolition of slavery in Afghanistan in 1924. SDIR, [Evidence](#), 16 June 2023, 1410 (Ali Karimi, Assistant Professor, University of Calgary).

20 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 16 June 2023, 1435 (Melissa Kerr Chiovena, Assistant Professor).

## Classification of the Persecution of the Hazaras as Genocide

The subcommittee heard significant testimony that the persecution of the Hazaras amounted to genocide. Niamatullah Ibrahim discussed the elements of genocide as codified in the *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide* (Genocide Convention), pointing out that Article II defines genocidal acts as those committed with the “intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group.”<sup>21</sup> He compared the persecution of the Hazaras from 1891 to 1893 to the Armenian genocide during the First World War in terms of intensity and scope, underscoring that genocide does not require the complete annihilation of a group. Witnesses highlighted the specific targeting of Hazaras from 1891–1893 based on the Hazara people forming a distinct ethnic group with “Central Asian phenotype”<sup>22</sup> or appearance and, in most cases, a distinct religious group, aligning with the targeted group criteria set out in Article II.<sup>23</sup>

Witnesses noted that the intent to destroy the Hazaras was explicitly evident in the declaration of a fatwa of jihad. They added that the war against the Hazaras was also characterized by the use of dehumanizing language, targeting based on race and religion, and the active involvement of “the entire society,” in addition to the army.<sup>24</sup> Melissa Kerr Chiovenda argued that this demonstrated a level of intent to destroy that was not seen in other campaigns at the time in Afghanistan.<sup>25</sup>

Article II of the Genocide Convention also outlines the acts that may constitute genocide. Witnesses observed that, alongside the killing of an estimated 62% of the Hazara population, other elements of the Amir’s persecution appear to align with the prohibited acts outlined in the Genocide Convention. For example, Melissa Kerr Chiovenda emphasized the creation of living conditions aimed at physically destroying a group. She specifically addressed the confiscation of Hazara lands, forced displacement, enslavement, and the imposition of burdensome taxation as examples of such conditions. She stressed that the severity of taxation, though not immediately

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21 SDIR, *Evidence*, 17 October 2023, 1140 (Niamatullah Ibrahim, Senior Lecturer, International Relations, La Trobe University); United Nations General Assembly, *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*, 9 December 1948, Art. II.

22 SDIR, *Evidence*, 17 October 2023, 1105 (Niamatullah Ibrahim, Senior Lecturer, International Relations, La Trobe University).

23 Niamatullah Ibrahim, Melissa Chiovenda, and William Maley, *Genocide of Hazaras in Afghanistan*, Brief submitted to SDIR, 2023; SDIR, *Evidence*, 16 June 2023, 1405 (Melissa Kerr Chiovenda, Assistant Professor).

24 Ibid.

25 SDIR, *Evidence*, 16 June 2023, 1405 (Melissa Kerr Chiovenda, Assistant Professor).



apparent, was deliberately crafted to impede Hazara survival. Additionally, she highlighted the forced marriages and rape of Hazara women, suggesting these could be seen as strategies to prevent the birth of Hazara children, further contributing to the group's destruction.<sup>26</sup>

Witnesses identified the mass persecution of 1891–1893 as a defining moment in the collective trauma of Hazaras, noting that the episode triggered a prolonged period of persecution that has spanned over a century.<sup>27</sup> Ibrahim Mohebi further emphasized that the events not only laid the foundation for the Hazaras' ongoing vulnerability, but also established the potential for genocide to be committed against Hazaras in Afghanistan today. He explained that the long-term consequence of the jihad against the Hazaras is that they continue to be viewed as “infidels” and lesser citizens.<sup>28</sup>

The subcommittee acknowledges the importance of honouring the victims of all mass atrocities and genocides, a crucial step to preventing them in the future. Additionally, witnesses testified that the effects of the 1891–1893 persecution of the Hazaras, resulting from the fatwa against them, continue to have an impact on the Hazara community. Acknowledging these historical atrocities, such as with the proclamation of September 25 as Hazara massacre memorial day, can contribute to healing and foster positive change for the future.

In the words of Mr. Mohebi:

The recognition of the 1891–93 Hazara genocide won't revive those who were brutally slaughtered, but it will help to change the social and psychological view and belief towards the Hazara. The recognition of the Hazara genocide will not heal our grandparents' wounds, but it will ensure our grandchildren feel valued and can live with dignity.<sup>29</sup>

## **The Return of the Taliban, 2021 to Present**

As noted above, from the time of their persecution under Abdur Rahman Khan, to the resurgence of the Taliban in 2021, the Hazaras have endured ongoing persecution, interrupted by brief periods of relative stability. During periods of stability, the Hazaras engaged in Afghanistan's democratic processes, with Hazara women playing pivotal roles

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26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 16 June 2023, 1430 (Ibrahim Mohebi, President, Canadian Hazara Humanitarian Services).

29 Ibid.

in society.<sup>30</sup> Yet they also often faced violent persecution, including a massacre in Mazar-i-Sharif in 1998 in which thousands of Hazara were murdered, and the destruction of ancient Buddha statues in Bamiyan in March 2001.<sup>31</sup> The subcommittee acknowledges the persecution of the Hazaras at the hands of the Taliban, Islamic State – Khorasan Province (ISIS-K) and other extremist groups before the return of the Taliban in 2021. However, given that attacks against the Hazaras in Afghanistan are ongoing, the subcommittee wishes to focus the remainder of this report on the most recent events and potential actions suggested by witnesses to address the issue.

With the resurgence of the Taliban, the Hazaras are facing increased security threats and systematic exclusion from government institutions. Women and girls have seen the reversal of progress made following the international intervention in 2001 and Hazara communities are once again facing displacement. The renewed persecution has reignited fears of a situation similar to the 1891–1893 persecution under Abdur Rahman Khan. Tahir Shaaran highlighted the gravity of the situation:

[W]ith the return of the Taliban to power, Hazaras now face rapidly escalating targeted attacks, forced displacement, summary executions and mass atrocities, amounting to a systematic genocide characterized by intentional displacement and killings ... hundreds of Hazaras have been killed and thousands displaced, and the number of Hazara government employees has been significantly decreased. International aid has been diverted from the region, while Hazara employment in international organizations has declined.<sup>32</sup>

## Security Threats

Ali Karimi noted that Afghanistan today resembles a region without rule of law and that the Taliban have established a reign of terror.<sup>33</sup> Numerous incidents targeting the Hazara community since the Taliban's takeover in August 2021 were reported to the subcommittee. Examples of the attacks mentioned by witnesses include:

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30 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 17 October 2023, 1205 (Tahir Shaaran, Canadian Hazara Advocacy Group); Niamatullah Ibrahim, "[America Can't Turn Away From the Hazara Genocide](#)," *The National Interest*, Reference document submitted to SDIR, 23 October 2022. The Hazaras have also demonstrated commitments to gender-inclusive education and human rights, and they supported peace initiatives following the international intervention in 2001.

31 Niamatullah Ibrahim, Melissa Chioyenda, and William Maley, *Genocide of Hazaras in Afghanistan*, Brief submitted to SDIR, 2023.

32 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 17 October 2023, 1115 (Tahir Shaaran, Canadian Hazara Advocacy Group).

33 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 16 June 2023, 1410 (Ali Karimi, Assistant Professor, University of Calgary).



- In July 2021, following the Taliban’s seizure of the Malistan district in Ghazni province, nine Hazaras were killed in Mundarakht village. Six were shot, while three were tortured to death. Zaman Sultani, South Asia Researcher, Amnesty International, told the subcommittee that when villagers returned to Mundarakht to collect food for their families, they were captured and tortured to death while others were ambushed and killed at Taliban checkpoints.<sup>34</sup>
- In August 2021, Taliban forces executed 13 Hazaras in the Malistan district in Ghazni province, including 11 former security force members, after instructing them to surrender their weapons. In addition to these former officers, two civilians with no security background were also killed, one of whom was a 17-year-old girl. Nine out of the 11 security personnel were shot dead after surrendering.<sup>35</sup>
- On 30 September 2022, a suicide bomb attack at the Kaaj Educational Center in Kabul resulted in the deaths of 53 students, including 35 girls and young women, and injured 110 others. The attack occurred in a Hazara-dominated neighborhood while students were writing a practice university entrance exam. No group claimed responsibility for the incident.<sup>36</sup>
- On 13 October 2023, a bomb exploded at the Imam Zaman Mosque in Pul-e Khumri, Baghlan, which is frequently attended by the Hazara community. This attack resulted in 20 deaths and 74 injuries. The Terrorism Victims Protection Organization reported that ISIS-K claimed responsibility for the attack.<sup>37</sup>
- On 26 October 2023, an improvised explosive device detonated at the Mellat Boxing Club in a neighbourhood populated by Shia Hazaras in

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34 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 24 October 2023, 1215 (Zaman Sultani, South Asia Researcher, Amnesty International).

35 Ibid.

36 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 24 October 2023, 1210 (Soomaya Javadi, As an Individual); Niamatullah Ibrahim, “[America Can’t Turn Away From the Hazara Genocide](#),” *The National Interest*, Reference document submitted to SDIR, 23 October 2022; SDIR, [Evidence](#), 17 October 2023, 1115 (Tahir Shaaran, Canadian Hazara Advocacy Group); SDIR, [Evidence](#), 24 October 2023, 1215 (Zaman Sultani, South Asia Researcher, Amnesty International); SDIR, [Evidence](#), 16 June 2023, 1415 (Mohd Rajabi, As an Individual).

37 Terrorism Victims Protection Organization, *Report on Terrorist Attack on the Shiite Hazara Community at Imam Zaman Mosque in Baghlan, October 13, 2023*, Reference document submitted to SDIR, 1 November 2023.

Kabul. The incident resulted in four deaths and 11 injuries. No group has claimed responsibility for the attack.<sup>38</sup>

Zaman Sultani told the subcommittee that Amnesty International has been documenting killings of Hazaras since the Taliban returned to power. However, he noted that “[i]t is near impossible” to collect and verify information on atrocities occurring in Afghanistan, particularly from rural areas and other areas where Hazaras are living.<sup>39</sup> Tahir Shaaran also highlighted the difficulty of retrieving human rights information from Afghanistan. He stated that “having direct access on the ground is not easy.”<sup>40</sup> During his efforts to gather accurate information by contacting numerous people, he found that many were fearful for their lives. He noted that sending a text message or reporting something could potentially put their lives at risk.

### Hazara Women and Girls

The progressive views of the Hazaras have made them more vulnerable to persecution in Afghanistan, particularly in the case of women and girls.<sup>41</sup> Ali Karimi highlighted the Hazaras’ commitment to gender equality, ensuring access to education and employment for women. He stated that in one district of the Ghazni province, the number of girls attending high school surpasses that in the entire Helmand province, a predominantly Pashtun area. He added that this progressive stance makes Hazaras a target for extremist groups, leading to persistent attacks on educational institutions.<sup>42</sup>

Shamim Ahmadi expressed concern about the return to power of the Taliban and highlighted the particular vulnerabilities faced by Hazara women and young girls. She noted that currently, like many other girls in the country, Hazara girls are confined to their homes, unable to venture outside freely. She said that the situation is particularly grim for Hazara girls due to the risk of abduction and assault, primarily because of their distinctive facial features and the way they dress and conduct themselves in society. Ms. Ahmadi told the subcommittee that when the Taliban seized control in Afghanistan in 2021, many women, girls, and their families attempted to flee to Pakistan. The

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38 Terrorism Victims Protection Organization, *Report on the Terrorist Attack on the Hazara Community at Mellat Sports Center in West Kabul, October 26, 2023*, Reference document submitted to SDIR, 1 November 2023.

39 SDIR, *Evidence*, 24 October 2023, 1235 (Zaman Sultani, South Asia Researcher, Amnesty International).

40 SDIR, *Evidence*, 17 October 2023, 1155 (Tahir Shaaran, Canadian Hazara Advocacy Group).

41 Niamatullah Ibrahim, “[America Can’t Turn Away From the Hazara Genocide](#),” *The National Interest*, Reference document submitted to SDIR, 23 October 2022.

42 SDIR, *Evidence*, 16 June 2023, 1450 (Ali Karimi, Assistant Professor, University of Calgary).



Taliban, however, specifically targeted Hazara women, preventing them from crossing the border. Ms. Ahmadi said that even if the women concealed themselves with burkas, Hazara children with distinctive facial features were enough for the Taliban to identify and stop them.<sup>43</sup>

Shabnam Salehi observed that gender apartheid is now a widespread issue in Afghanistan, particularly impacting women and girls with overlapping marginalized identities.<sup>44</sup>

The subcommittee found the testimony of Soomaya Javadi, a Hazara activist who fled to Canada after the overthrow of Kabul in 2021, particularly poignant. She spoke about the despair she felt upon the Taliban's return:

On August 15, 2021, at 6 p.m., I realized that Afghanistan had fallen to the Taliban. I was an educated Hazara Shia woman. I belonged to the ethnicity, gender and religion most hated by the Taliban. People like me still in Afghanistan—if not dead yet—are now totally excluded from every aspect of life outside the home. I had already faced gender-based and racial discrimination at the university and workplace. I knew the history, and I knew what was coming next.<sup>45</sup>

## Institutional Impacts

Zaman Sultani emphasized to the subcommittee that since the Taliban regained power, the Hazara community has faced increasing exclusion from decision-making and representation. The Taliban has systematically replaced Hazara government employees in provinces with significant Hazara populations. Furthermore, the Hazara community is notably absent from any representation in the Taliban's cabinet.<sup>46</sup>

As part of the Taliban's broader campaign of marginalizing Shias and Hazaras, they have specifically targeted educational and judicial institutions. This has included the exclusion of Shia jurisprudence from the curriculum in university programs in areas like Bamiyan, a Hazara Shia majority region.<sup>47</sup> Niamatullah Ibrahim informed the subcommittee that the

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43 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 16 June 2023, 1445 (Shamim Ahmadi, Settlement Manager, Canadian Hazara Humanitarian Services).

44 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 17 October 2023, 1150 (Shabnam Salehi, Visiting Lecturer and Researcher, University of Ottawa).

45 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 24 October 2023, 1210 (Soomaya Javadi, As an Individual).

46 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 24 October 2023, 1215 (Zaman Sultani, South Asia Researcher, Amnesty International).

47 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 17 October 2023, 1125 (Niamatullah Ibrahim, Senior Lecturer, International Relations, La Trobe University).



Taliban have also removed Shia judges from courts throughout Afghanistan, leaving no Shia representation in the judiciary. This action is significant, as land confiscations, discussed below, and violence against Hazaras are often sanctioned through Taliban-controlled court proceedings.<sup>48</sup>

## Forced Evictions and Displacement

Witnesses reported to the subcommittee that the Taliban's return to power has led to forced evictions and displacements of Hazaras, with Niamatullah Ibrahim noting that these displacements have resulted in Hazaras leaving their ancestral lands across various Afghan provinces.<sup>49</sup>

Tahir Shaaran informed the subcommittee that thousands of Hazaras have been displaced due to annual conflicts between Hazaras and Afghan nomads, known as Kuchis. He explained that in these disputes, fabricated documents are being used to unlawfully seize Hazara lands in Hazarajat.<sup>50</sup> In a brief to the subcommittee, the World Hazara Council explained that the conflict between the Hazaras and the Kuchis involves a recurring dispute between the two groups every summer. The Kuchis are ethnic Pashtuns, and the conflict's roots can be traced back to 1894, when Abdur Rahman Khan issued an edict awarding lands in Hazarajat to Kuchi clans who had helped him defeat the Hazara resistance.<sup>51</sup> Tahir Shaaran also noted that the Taliban imposed various taxes on Hazaras in the countryside, effectively forcing them to leave.<sup>52</sup>

Zaman Sultani referenced a Human Rights Watch report that stated that 2,800 Hazara residents were evicted from their homes in September 2021 alone from 15 villages in the Daykundi and Uruzgan provinces.<sup>53</sup>

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48 Ibid.

49 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 17 October 2023, 1105 (Niamatullah Ibrahim, Senior Lecturer, International Relations, La Trobe University)

50 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 17 October 2023, 1115 (Tahir Shaaran, Canadian Hazara Advocacy Group).

51 World Hazara Council, *A Human Rights Situational Analysis of Ethnic-Hazaras in Afghanistan and Pakistan*, Brief submitted to SDIR, p. 1.

52 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 17 October 2023, 1115 (Tahir Shaaran, Canadian Hazara Advocacy Group).

53 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 24 October 2023, 1215 (Zaman Sultani, South Asia Researcher, Amnesty International).



## Access to Foreign Aid

While grateful for foreign assistance to Afghanistan, witnesses reported that international aid to the country is being diverted by the Taliban away from the Hazaras. This diversion happens both by pressure exerted by the Taliban on the ground and by negotiations between the Taliban and international organizations.<sup>54</sup> Tahir Shaaran described an instance where aid designated for Bamiyan's 10 districts was rerouted by the Taliban, who informed the donors they could only operate in Afghanistan if the aid was sent to a different province. Often, the Taliban permit only a fraction of aid to reach Hazara communities, on the condition that much larger portions are directed elsewhere.<sup>55</sup> Soomaya Javadi pointed out that the problem is compounded by humanitarian organizations' dependence on the Taliban for distributing aid.<sup>56</sup>

The marginalization of Hazaras in government and politics under the Taliban exacerbates the issue. Soomaya Javadi noted that the absence of Hazaras from high-level government positions limits their ability to establish connections with foreign organizations, further isolating them and hindering access to aid.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, Tahir Shaaran noted that, since the return of the Taliban, the employment of Hazaras in international organizations has declined.<sup>58</sup>

## Enduring Risk of Mass Atrocities

In considering the persecution detailed above, Niamatullah Ibrahim observed a resurgence of patterns of persecution similar to those under Abdur Rahman Khan. These include systematic attacks on Hazara places of worship, hospitals, educational centres, and cultural and religious figures, along with widespread marginalization, political persecution, and forced displacement from ancestral homelands. This observation led him to issue the following warning:

All of this, I think, brings us to the fact that the Hazaras are not only the victims of a genocide that was quite well documented in Afghanistan historically; there is also at present the danger of a genocide and atrocities targeting the Hazaras under the Taliban rule in Afghanistan. The Taliban as well as other groups, such as Islamic State Khorasan, are committing a series of acts of violence and mass atrocities that are specifically

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54 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 17 October 2023, 1155 (Tahir Shaaran, Canadian Hazara Advocacy Group).

55 Ibid.

56 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 24 October 2023, 1250 (Soomaya Javadi, As an Individual).

57 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 24 October 2023, 1245 (Soomaya Javadi, As an Individual).

58 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 17 October 2023, 1115 (Tahir Shaaran, Canadian Hazara Advocacy Group).

targeted towards the Hazaras and indicate an intention to destroy the Hazaras in whole and in part as an ethnic and religious group in Afghanistan.<sup>59</sup>

Niamatullah Ibrahim further pointed out that ongoing incidents, including attacks on maternity wards, educational centers, and particularly young Hazara girls, represent an intent to commit genocide against the Hazaras. Considering these events together, he argued that there is ample evidence of an ongoing intention to destroy the Hazaras, at least in part.<sup>60</sup>

Shamim Ahmadi noted that even with the previous internationally backed Afghan government, Hazaras were often targeted while travelling between cities, and with the Taliban's rise to power, "we are more at risk of another genocide."<sup>61</sup> She observed that currently, the Taliban appear to be holding back on actions against the Hazaras within the country, possibly waiting for international recognition as the official government. She warned that "if [the Taliban] are recognized once, they will start attacking Hazaras."<sup>62</sup>

### **PART III: ADDRESSING THE ISSUE**

While witnesses provided the subcommittee with important information regarding the plight of the Hazaras, they also offered insight into how the issue might best be addressed by the international community. Central to their recommendations was the urgent need for increased international awareness of the situation of the Hazaras. They also suggested strategies for refugee intake and enhanced monitoring and investigation of acts committed against the Hazaras.

#### **Recognition of Persecution**

Referring to a "systematic silence" that has accompanied the persecution of the Hazaras, Ali Karim stated that:

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59 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 17 October 2023, 1110 (Niamatullah Ibrahim, Senior Lecturer, International Relations, La Trobe University).

60 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 17 October 2023, 1140 (Niamatullah Ibrahim, Senior Lecturer, International Relations, La Trobe University).

61 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 16 June 2023, 1430 (Shamim Ahmadi, Settlement Manager, Canadian Hazara Humanitarian Services).

62 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 16 June 2023, 1445 (Shamim Ahmadi, Settlement Manager, Canadian Hazara Humanitarian Services).



Despite all their suffering, the Afghan state or even people rarely acknowledge what the Hazaras have gone through. In schoolbooks and other instruments of propagating official narratives, the Hazaras are either absent or misrepresented.<sup>63</sup>

Similarly, Shamim Ahmadi stated that, historically, attacks on Hazaras were not accurately reported in global news, with casualty figures often being downplayed.<sup>64</sup>

Consequently, and mirroring efforts to highlight the persecution of the Hazaras under Abdur Rahman Khan, witnesses once again emphasized the importance of global awareness of the situation of the Hazaras. Niamatullah Ibrahim stated that recognition of the hardships faced by the Hazaras would be a crucial first step and would contribute to preventing future persecution against them. He believed that this could lead to “a series of other measures undertaken by Canada and other international players to prevent a future recurrence of these atrocities towards the Hazaras.”<sup>65</sup>

While some witnesses argued that the genocide against the Hazaras under Abdur Rahman Khan has already resurfaced or continues under the Taliban and ISIS-K,<sup>66</sup> others feared that the historical persecution combined with current Taliban rule poses an imminent threat of genocide to the Hazaras.<sup>67</sup> In either case, the subcommittee recognizes the urgency of highlighting the current persecution of the Hazaras as a matter of utmost importance.

## Improving Resettlement

Witnesses voiced concern that a lack of understanding of the situation of the Hazaras is leading to an inability for them to leave Afghanistan and claim refugee status. Niamatullah Ibrahim told the subcommittee that while the Hazaras face the highest level of risk, they are the least represented among those resettled from Afghanistan over

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63 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 16 June 2023, 1410 (Ali Karimi, Assistant Professor, University of Calgary).

64 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 16 June 2023, 1435 (Shamim Ahmadi, Settlement Manager, Canadian Hazara Humanitarian Services).

65 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 17 October 2023, 1200 (Niamatullah Ibrahim, Senior Lecturer, International Relations, La Trobe University).

66 For example, Gregory Stanton asserted that the Hazara in Afghanistan are experiencing a “continuous slow-motion genocide.” SDIR, [Evidence](#), 24 October 2023, 1220 (Gregory Stanton, President, Genocide Watch). Zaman Sultani stated, “Institutionally, opinions might differ, but to me, personally, the Hazaras have openly faced and are facing a genocidal attack, and that continues today.” SDIR, [Evidence](#), 24 October 2023, 1300 (Zaman Sultani, South Asia Researcher, Amnesty International).

67 See, for example Mohd Rajabi: “it’s going to be Canada’s duty to recognize the Hazaras genocide in the past and also to recognize that there continues to be an imminent threat against the Hazaras and that it’s possible this will happen again.” SDIR, [Evidence](#), 16 June 2023, 1520 (Mohd Rajabi, as an Individual).

the past two years. He highlighted the importance of adequately assessing threats during the refugee determination process, pointing out that certain characteristics, such as gender, ethnicity, and “progressive views” increase the vulnerability of Hazaras in Afghanistan. As an example, he specifically highlighted the plight of Hazara women who had been members of the security forces.<sup>68</sup> Melissa Kerr Chiovenda agreed, stating:

There’s an almost complete lack of understanding of the particular vulnerable situation that many categories of people in Afghanistan face. Everybody knows that women are vulnerable, but beyond that, there’s not really an understanding. I think the problem of Hazaras as an ethnic and religious minority is first and foremost there.<sup>69</sup>

For Gregory Stanton the issue is less one of lack of understanding and more one of bias. He stated that representatives of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Afghanistan appear to favor Sunni Muslims, leading to a low number of Hazaras being resettled in countries that depend on the United Nations (UN) refugee recognition system. He added that the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) has been pressured to hire mainly Pashtuns, predominantly Sunni Muslims, due to Taliban influence. As a result, he stated that the religious discrimination prevalent in Afghanistan is reflected in the staffing and operations of the UN mission.<sup>70</sup>

Niamatullah Ibrahim suggested that Canada could play a crucial role in helping Hazaras at risk in Afghanistan, especially given the recent harsh stance on refugees taken by the governments of Iran and Pakistan.<sup>71</sup> This suggestion was echoed by Gregory Stanton, who urged all refugee resettling countries to prioritize the resettlement of Hazara refugees.<sup>72</sup>

Melissa Kerr Chiovenda argued that enacting special immigration measures, similar to those for Ukrainians fleeing Vladimir Putin’s war of aggression, would be beneficial for other regions of the world experiencing humanitarian crises. She explained that the world’s reaction to the war in Ukraine and the welcoming of Ukrainian refugees is a model that should be applied to all conflicts, and to people who are vulnerable or facing persecution or genocide worldwide. She further noted that recognizing the Hazaras’

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68 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 17 October 2023, 1205 (Niamatullah Ibrahim (Senior Lecturer, International Relations, La Trobe University, As an Individual).

69 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 16 June 2023, 1510 (Melissa Kerr Chiovenda, Assistant Professor).

70 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 24 October 2023, 1250 (Gregory Stanton, President, Genocide Watch).

71 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 17 October 2023, 1205 (Niamatullah Ibrahim, Senior Lecturer, International Relations, La Trobe University).

72 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 24 October 2023, 1225 (Gregory Stanton, President, Genocide Watch).



particularly vulnerable status in Afghanistan and Pakistan through special immigration measures would offer them much-needed protection:

I think this might bring us back to an acknowledgement of the necessity not only to recognize Hazaras as people in need of protection when it comes to seeking refugee status or asylum, but also to recognize genocide. I think that would be incredibly important here.<sup>73</sup>

For Gregory Stanton, offering asylum to Hazaras could yield benefits beyond immediate individual aid, suggesting that empowering diaspora communities can play a role in challenging oppressive regimes. He advocated for Canada to facilitate the temporary or permanent resettlement of more Hazaras, believing this could positively affect the situation in Afghanistan.<sup>74</sup>

## Monitoring and Investigation

Previously, this report outlined the difficulties faced by Amnesty International in thoroughly documenting the persecution of the Hazaras following the Taliban's return to power, as well as Tahir Shaaran's challenges in collecting information due to his contacts' fears for their safety.<sup>75</sup> In light of these challenges, witnesses advocated for employing international mechanisms to examine the persecution of the Hazaras. Gregory Stanton and Niamatullah Ibrahim specifically highlighted the potential for the UN Human Rights Council to set up an independent fact-finding mission to investigate attacks on the Hazara community.<sup>76</sup> Witnesses also stressed the importance of the International Criminal Court incorporating acts against the Hazaras in Afghanistan into its ongoing investigation of the situation in Afghanistan.<sup>77</sup> Tahir Shaaran also noted that Canada could take an active role in closely monitoring the human rights issues facing the Hazaras by creating a "special desk for Hazaras' human rights."<sup>78</sup>

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73 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 16 June 2023, 1510 (Melissa Kerr Chioyenda, Assistant Professor).

74 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 24 October 2023, 1225 (Gregory Stanton, President, Genocide Watch).

75 See the section *Security Threats* above.

76 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 24 October 2023, 1225 (Gregory Stanton, President, Genocide Watch); SDIR, [Evidence](#), 17 October 2023, 1150 (Niamatullah Ibrahim, Senior Lecturer, International Relations, La Trobe University).

77 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 24 October 2023, 1225 (Gregory Stanton, President, Genocide Watch); SDIR, [Evidence](#), 17 October 2023, 1150 (Niamatullah Ibrahim, Senior Lecturer, International Relations, La Trobe University); SDIR, [Evidence](#), 24 October 2023, 1210 (Soomaya Javadi, As an Individual).

78 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 17 October 2023, 1155 (Tahir Shaaran, Canadian Hazara Advocacy Group).

## CONCLUSION

The Hazaras' story is one of quiet resilience and of overcoming persecution to rebuild communities, only to face new hardships. It is also one of a people deserving to be heard and to receive the international recognition and support they need. The subcommittee carefully listened to the witnesses who participated in the study, and who provided compelling evidence of the Hazaras' historical persecution in the late 19th century. Their testimony about the 1891–93 genocide provided a comprehensive understanding of its enduring impact, and how the silence surrounding it has empowered their current persecutors. Witnesses also clearly depicted the present-day vulnerability of the Hazaras in Afghanistan, as they face constant threats from the Taliban, ISIS-K, and other terrorist groups. Nevertheless, the Hazaras persevere, even amidst attacks on their schools, places of worship, hospitals, and sports clubs.

The subcommittee recognizes the Hazara endured mass atrocities under Abdur Rahman Khan from 1891 to 1893 and acknowledges the present-day persecution faced by the Hazara community. Accordingly, this report is meant to not only recognize their past suffering, but also to help protect their future by recognizing September 25th of every year as the day to remember the massacre of the Hazaras from 1891 to 1893. Once again, the subcommittee extends its utmost gratitude to the witnesses for their contributions to the study. It also expresses its hope for a future where the Hazaras of Afghanistan can live without persecution and fear.





## APPENDIX A: LIST OF WITNESSES

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The following table lists the witnesses who appeared before the committee at its meetings related to this report. Transcripts of all public meetings related to this report are available on the committee’s [webpage for this study](#).

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
<b>As an individual</b> Ali Karimi, Assistant Professor, University of Calgary Melissa Kerr Chiovenda, Assistant Professor Mohd Rajabi	2023/06/16	33
<b>Canadian Hazara Humanitarian Services</b> Shamim Ahmadi, Settlement Manager Ibrahim Mohebi, President	2023/06/16	33
<b>As an individual</b> Dr. Niamatullah Ibrahim, Senior Lecturer, International Relations, La Trobe University Shabnam Salehi, Visiting Lecturer and Researcher, University of Ottawa	2023/10/17	35
<b>Canadian Hazara Advocacy Group</b> Dr. Tahir Shaaran	2023/10/17	35
<b>As an individual</b> Soomaya Javadi	2023/10/24	36
<b>Amnesty International</b> Zaman Sultani, South Asia Researcher	2023/10/24	36
<b>Genocide Watch</b> Gregory H. Stanton, President	2023/10/24	36



## **APPENDIX B: LIST OF BRIEFS**

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The following is an alphabetical list of organizations and individuals who submitted briefs to the committee related to this report. For more information, please consult the committee's [webpage for this study](#).

**Canadian Hazara Advocacy Group**

**Ibrahimi, Niamatullah**

**Kerr Chiovenda, Melissa**

**Maley, William**

**World Hazara Council**



## REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this Report.

A copy of the relevant *Minutes of Proceedings* of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development ([Meeting No. 116](#)) is tabled and a copy of the relevant *Minutes of Proceedings* of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights ([Meetings Nos. 33, 35, 36, 43, 46 to 49 and 54](#)) is tabled.

Respectfully submitted,

Ali Ehsassi  
Chair

