

UN Forum on Minority Issues - The Hazara People

Thank you, Chairperson. Excellencies, member states and participants - I thank the United Nations for sponsoring this important forum at this critical time.

I am Sitarah Mohammadi, the spokesperson for the World Hazara Council. I am a woman from one of the most persecuted peoples in the world, the Hazara people, an ethnic and religious minority that have been facing systematic persecution and genocide in Afghanistan.

The Hazara people are at high risk of continuing genocide under the current Taliban regime, who are predominately ethnic Pashtun and extremists Sunni Muslims.

The Hazara people make up **roughly 25-30%** of the total population of Afghanistan. Hazara people are one of the largest refugee groups in the world. For over a century, Hazara people have been among Afghanistan's strongest supporters of democracy, freedom, progressive thinking, and the pursuit of education.

Afghanistan is a country of minorities, with none of its ethnic groups making up a majority. However, the Hazara people, predominantly Shia Muslims, are a religious minority in a Sunni Muslim majority Afghanistan.

The Hazara people have long faced relentless, systematic, genocidal massacres based on our ethnic and religious identity, and for our democratic and liberal values.

We have endured systematic marginalization, discrimination, and persecution under the Pashtun rulers since the late 19th century. The Hazara people have been collectively subjected to slavery, systematic eviction from our ancestral homes and lands, and genocidal massacres.

In the late 19th century, the Pashtun ruler Abdul Rahman waged a brutal war against the Hazara people, which included bloody massacres, looting and pillaging of our homes, enslavement and the transfer of Hazara land to friendly tribes.

Historians have estimated that Abdul Rahman's massacres **killed 62%** of Afghanistan's Hazara population.

Persecution of Hazaras continued in the twentieth century. Until the 1970s, the Afghan government did not allow Hazara people any access to higher education, especially in universities that trained candidates for army and government jobs.

The killing of Hazara people has been preached as a key to paradise by some Sunni Muslim clerics.

In the **1990s**, there were at least nine genocidal massacres of Hazaras by the Taliban regime.

Taliban commanders publicly proclaim the slogan:

“Tajiks to Tajikistan, Uzbeks to Uzbekistan, and Hazaras to Goristan”.

Goristan means graveyard.

In August 1998, in just a few days, the Taliban massacred **eight thousand** Hazaras in Mazar-i-Sharif simply because of their ethnic identity as Hazara people.

Since 2002, the Hazara people of Afghanistan have suffered over **300** targeted massacres.

Since 2015, the Islamic State-Khorasan (ISKP), affiliated with the Haqqani Network, has claimed responsibility for some of these massacres, giving the Taliban a way to deny responsibility, even though the Haqqani Network is part of the Taliban regime.

To date, none of these crimes carried out against Hazara people has been investigated.

These massacres all have the elements of the crime of genocide in Article II of the 1948 Genocide Convention. They have led international organizations such as the *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum* and *Genocide Watch* to declare Genocide Alerts regarding the threat of genocide against the Hazara people of Afghanistan.

Hazaras have been attacked in educational centres, places of worship, maternity hospitals, sporting facilities, public gatherings, and wedding halls.

Under the Taliban rule since August 2021, genocidal attacks against Hazaras have increased significantly. A genocidal attack this September on a Hazara educational centre murdered 58 Hazara students.

Yet the UN and the international press nearly always refuse to identify the victims as Hazaras and fail to note the ethnically and religiously targeted nature of the attacks. This is Genocide Denial.

The current spate of systematic attacks, hate speech and dehumanising language such as infidels and outsiders directed against Hazara people have proven to have organisational elements and has been specifically targeting Hazara people across the country and in all aspects of their public lives.

The Hazara people are enduring a continuous slow-motion genocide by attrition in Afghanistan.

Urgent international action is needed to protect the Hazara people of Afghanistan.

I conclude with the following recommendations:

- 1.** The United Nations, United States, European Union, United Kingdom, journalists, and human rights organizations must recognise that the systematically targeted attacks against the Hazara people in Afghanistan meet the definition of genocide: the intentional destruction of a substantial part of an ethnic and religious group, as such.
- 2.** The United Nations and national governments should initiate urgent consultations with Hazara organizations, such as the World Hazara Council, on practical actions for the protection of the Hazara people in Afghanistan, including an internationally assisted, supported, and monitored self-defence.
- 3.** The United Nations Human Rights Council should establish an independent fact-finding mission to investigate the ongoing systematic attacks on Hazara people, to collect evidence, map, document, and conduct investigations into the ongoing atrocities against Hazara people in Afghanistan.
- 4.** The International Criminal Court should expand the scope of its authorised investigation into war crimes in Afghanistan to include cases of crimes against humanity and genocide against the Hazara people up to the present day.
- 5.** We urge all refugee resettling countries to prioritise Hazara refugees for asylum and resettlement in their countries.

