

April 8, 2020

United States Embassy (Kabul)

Chargé d'Affaires Ross Wilson

Bibi Mahru

Kabul, Afghanistan

kabulACS@state.gov

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Representative in Afghanistan

P.O. Box 3232

***POUCH STILL VIA LO-OFFICE FOR UNHCR,
REPRESENTATION AFGHANISTAN IN ISLAMABAD***

Kabul, Afghanistan

afgka@unhcr.org

RE: Persecution of Sikhs and Hindus in Afghanistan

Dear Ambassador Wilson and Colleagues:

We request your immediate intervention on behalf of Sikhs and Hindus who experience persecution and violence with increased regularity in Afghanistan and whose lives are in imminent danger.

On March 25, 2020, twenty-five Sikhs were massacred at their temple in Kabul, Afghanistan. They had gathered that morning to pray for the health and well-being of the world in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the victims, Tania Kaur, was only four-years-old. An Islamic State affiliate claimed responsibility for the attack. Later, a bomb was detonated at the funeral ceremony, additional explosive devices were found outside the temple, and survivors received an anonymous ultimatum warning of additional attacks if they did not leave Afghanistan within 10 days.

Notably, the Islamic State also claimed responsibility for a 2018 suicide bombing in Jalalabad that killed 19 people, including most of the senior leadership of the Afghan Sikh and Hindu communities.

According to community estimates, there may be as few as 700 Sikhs and Hindus out of a total population of approximately 35 million in Afghanistan. As documented by the U.S. Department of State and U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, Sikhs and Hindus experience systemic discrimination in Afghanistan on account of their religion. We are concerned they will continue to be subjected to the predations of extremist groups, including the Islamic State, and that the Afghan government will not be able to protect them from further violence. If the situation in Afghanistan continues to deteriorate following the departure of international troops, Afghan Sikhs and Hindus will be at risk of genocide.

The U.S. government establishes annual processing priorities that determine which refugees are “of special humanitarian concern to the United States” and therefore eligible to be considered for resettlement

in the United States.¹ In light of the violence unleashed on Afghan Sikhs and Hindus and the pervasive discrimination which they face on account of their religion, we request that the United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), with cooperation from the U.S. Embassy in Kabul, provide immediate assistance to all Afghan Sikh and Hindu families.

Specifically, we ask that you urgently and collaboratively implement the following requests:

U.S. Embassy (Kabul)

- Contact USRAP immediately and coordinate meetings between all Afghan Sikh and Hindu families and relevant agency partners operating under USRAP and UNHCR
- Refer and immediately recommend all Afghan Sikh and Hindu families for resettlement under the USRAP, as authorized by the U.S. Department of State

United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP)²

- Work with interagency partners – including the U.S. Department of State/Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Resettlement Support Centers (RSC) – to immediately interview and process Afghan Sikh and Hindu families residing in Afghanistan to facilitate their referral to USRAP
- In urgent situations, the local RSCs are authorized to screen applicants for expedited processing under the USRAP program. We ask that the RSCs expedite all of these families due to the imminent danger they face and **count them towards the 2020 Fiscal Year** under USRAP

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

- Immediately conduct a registration and resettlement referral, based on vulnerability and eligibility assessments
- Work with your interagency group (based in Afghanistan) on how to immediately respond to and protect internally displaced Afghan Sikhs and Hindus
- Meet and screen all Afghan Sikhs and Hindus for refugee eligibility and refer them to USRAP
- Move Afghan Sikhs and Hindus to a safe zone outside of Afghanistan, where further refugee screening eligibility can be conducted

The United States cannot turn its back on Afghan Sikhs and Hindus who are facing a horrific choice between exodus and extinction. They simply want to live in peace with security and dignity. We hope you understand the gravity of the situation they face and will act with urgency.

For further information about this letter and the requests herein, please contact Deepak Ahluwalia, Esq. (deepak@singhahluwalia.com) or Rajdeep Jolly, Esq. (raj@jollylawoffice.com).

¹ See USCIS, *The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) Consultation & Worldwide Processing Priorities*, <www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/refugees-asylum/refugees/united-states-refugee-admissions-program-usrap-consultation-worldwide-processing-priorities> (last updated Mar. 5, 2019); see also: e.g., DOS *et al.*, *Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2020* (Nov. 1, 2019), <<https://www.politico.com/f/?id=0000016d-bb51-d0d8-af6d-ff79261f0002>>.

² See USCIS, *Refugee Processing and Screening Security*, <<https://www.uscis.gov/refugeescreening>> (last updated Aug. 31, 2018).

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

The Sikh Coalition
Jakara Movement
Sikh American Veterans Alliance
Hindus for Human Rights
American Jewish Committee
Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights
Sadhana: Coalition of Progressive Hindus
B'nai B'rith International
Ensaaf
Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund
United Sikhs
Fresno Immigration Coalition
National Sikh Campaign
National Council of Churches
Union for Reform Judaism
American Islamic Forum for Democracy
Church State Council
Save Afghan Sikhs
Sikh Research Institute

cc:

Committee on the Judiciary, U.S. Senate
Committee on the Judiciary, U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate
Committee on Foreign Affairs, U.S. House of Representatives
U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom
Office of International Religious Freedom, U.S. Department of State