April 1, 2020

Chairman Lindsey Graham
Ranking Member Dianne Feinstein
U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary

Chairman Jerry Nadler
Ranking Member Doug Collins
U.S. House of Representatives Committee on the Judiciary

Chairman James E. Risch
Ranking Member Bob Menendez
U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations

Chairman Eliot L. Engel
Ranking Member Michael McCaul
U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs

Re: Persecution of Sikhs and Hindus in Afghanistan

Dear Senators and Representatives:

On behalf of the Sikh Coalition and the undersigned civil rights, human rights and interfaith organizations, we request your intervention on behalf of Sikhs and Hindus who face extinction in Afghanistan.

Last week, an ISIS terrorist massacred 25 Sikhs at a 400-year-old gurdwara (Sikh house of worship) in Kabul, Afghanistan.[1] This was immediately followed by a heinous bombing of the subsequent funeral services. On July 1, 2018, ISIS claimed responsibility for a suicide bombing in Jalalabad that claimed the lives of more than a dozen Sikh and Hindu community leaders.[2] Although Sikhs and Hindus have lived in Afghanistan for centuries, their population has fallen dramatically in recent decades due to religious persecution, which has been documented by the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom[3] and U.S. Department of State.[4]

It is important to remember that the country we now know as Afghanistan was once thriving with Sikh, Hindu and other religious minorities. There were once nearly 70 gurdwaras in Afghanistan; following the Taliban's rise to power, there are now approximately a dozen gurdwaras still functioning, signaling a massive drop in the Sikh population. [6] The Bamiyan Buddha statues were a notable reminder of Afghanistan's religious pluralism until their destruction by the Taliban in the months leading up to the 9/11 terrorist attacks against the United States.[7]

As you know, the U.S. war in Afghanistan has led to increased deadly violence in a myriad of ways, including towards Muslim religious minorities. The anticipated withdrawal of American and NATO personnel from Afghanistan will further pave the way for a continuation of atrocities against religious minorities, including the genocide of Afghan Sikhs and Hindus. In light of these grave challenges, we urge you and your colleagues to take the following steps:

1. Coordinate with federal agencies to grant refugee protection to Afghan Sikhs and Hindus on an emergency basis as a matter of special humanitarian concern.

2. Remove obstacles to the resettlement of Afghan Sikhs and Hindus in the United States and work with other allies to guarantee the safe resettlement of these individuals and families.

3. Condition all current and future aid to Afghanistan on verifiable protection of the human rights of its people, including religious minorities.

4. Schedule congressional hearings immediately on the plight of persecuted minorities in Afghanistan.

5. Condition all current and future aid to Afghanistan on removal of any content in government curricula and textbooks that demeans or ostracizes religious minorities.

American taxpayers should not subsidize human rights violations in Afghanistan, and American policymakers should not look the other way as Afghan Sikhs and Hindus struggle to survive.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

The Sikh Coalition
Anti-Defamation League (ADL)
Asian Americans Advancing Justice (AAAJ) - Atlanta
Emgage
ENSAAF
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Hindus for Human Rights
Jakara Movement
Matthew Shepard Foundation
MPower Change
Middle Collegiate Church
National Sikh Campaign
The Revolutionary Love Project

Sadhana Coalition of Progressive Hindus
Sakhi for South Asian Women
Satrang
Sikh American Legal Defense Fund (SALDEF)
Sikh Family Center
South Asian American Voices for Impact (SAAVI)
South Asian Workers' Center - Boston
South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT)
Stand with Kashmir
The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
The Islamic Center at NYU
United Sikhs

cc:

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, U.S. Department of State

U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom

Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

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[1] https://www.wsj.com/articles/islamic-state-attacks-sikh-temple-in-kabul-killing-25-11585140021
[2] https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/01/world/asia/afghanistan-school-attack-nangarhar.html
[3] https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/Tier2_AFGHANISTAN_2019.pdf
[4] https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/afghanistan/
[5] https://www.afghanembassy.us/about-afghanistan/constitution/
[6] https://www.theweek.in/theweek/cover/2019/11/02/afghan-sikhs-are-targeted-by-the-taliban-and-unable-to-even-bury-their-dead.html
[7] https://www.nytimes.com/2001/03/04/world/over-world-protests-taliban-are-destroying-ancient-buddhas.html