Press Release

On Sayed Ul Shuhada School Girls Massacre

May 9, 2021

On Saturday 8th May, a few days prior to Eid, a massacre of school girls took place in Sayed Ul Shuhada school in Dasht-e-Barchi, in West Kabul. At the time of writing, more than 50 are dead and 151 injured; most are children. Yet again, this massacre targeted Hazaras in Dasht-e-Barchi. Yet again, mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters – and an entire community – spent the night collapsed in grief.

Like many of us, these children, their mothers and father, were looking forward to celebrating Eid. But celebrating Eid is a joy these school girls will not experience. Celebrating Eid could not be farther from these parents’ shattered minds. Why?

Why were school children killed? Why were their dreams, and the hopes of their parents, turned to dust? For what purpose? To whose benefit? With whose support? These questions must be answered. Afghans suffer horrific incidents of loss repeatedly, and are left with unanswered questions due to the absence of investigation, and almost no communication with families or the public.

Time and again massacres are followed by condemnation. While condemnation and sympathy are welcome, is this a sufficient response to a massacre of school children, to attacks on universities, or lives lost in airstrikes? The United Nations, the United States, the EU, the UK, countries in the region, and fellow Muslim nations should call for credible and transparent investigations.

Only 9 days ago, 22 civilians were killed in Logar - most of whom were students. We must move beyond words – and work around the clock to ensure this is the last massacre of civilians, of children, in Afghanistan. Nothing short of this is acceptable.

AIHRC’s Special Investigation Team (SIT) has documented an increase in civilian casualties during Ramazan (13 April- 7 May). The SIT team documented 130 incidents, which resulted in 519 civilian casualties; 160 people were killed and 351 injured. These figures do not include yesterday’s massacre; there are also incidents which remain undocumented.

In light of the ongoing violence and loss of life, the lack of progress in peace talks and the horrific massacre yesterday, the AIHRC calls for these immediate steps to be taken:

1. Ceasefire now. The rate of civilian casualties is alarming; children, men and women are dying up and down the country. The only way to prevent civilian casualties is through a permanent ceasefire. The AIHRC calls on the Taliban to commit to a lasting ceasefire now.

2. Grant special protection, in line with international human rights law, to Hazaras and to the community in Dasht-e-Barchi. The Afghan government has an obligation under International
Humanitarian Law (IHL) and International Human Rights Law¹ to protect the population at risk of war crimes, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing or genocide² and international law obliges the government to take measures to end and prevent genocide and war crimes, crimes against humanity and persecution on the basis of ethnicity and gender. In October 2020, just over six months ago, more than 40 students died in an attack on Kawser Danish tutoring centre. In May 2020, almost a year ago 11 mothers were murdered with their unborn babies, two boys were, and an Afghan midwife were killed, with 5 mothers injured; this is femicide and infanticide. The Afghan government should fulfil its obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which includes acknowledging massacres targeting Hazaras. The Afghan government should communicate immediately a human rights-based protection plan for Dasht-e-Barchi and West Kabul. This should include plans for collective reparations.

3. Secretary General António Guterres should call a special leadership meeting this week, to be held prior to the first day of Eid, no later than Thursday, 13th May, and communicate to the Afghan people precisely what the UN is willing to do to address the murder of these children and the alarming rates of civilian casualties – and to guarantee this violence never repeats.

4. The UN Special Rapporteur for Children and Armed Conflict, Virginia Gambe de Potgieter, should immediately outline the concrete, practical steps the United Nations will take to ensure targeting of schools, tutoring centres and universities never repeats. Ms Gambe should communicate initial steps she will take prior to the first day of Eid and no later than Thursday, 13th May.

5. An expert and fully resourced, independent team of United Nations investigators to carry out a fact-finding mission into the massacre and unclaimed targeted attacks on civilians. Secretary General António Guterres should commit to sending a team of United Nations investigators to Afghanistan to carry out a fact-finding mission into a few major recent incidents in coordination with UNAMA. The purpose of this investigation would be identification of the perpetrators, as well as collection of evidence. The United Nations, the custodian of international human rights law, and acting in line with Security Council Resolution 2543 (2020), 6 (e), (g), and all previous Security Council Resolutions on Afghanistan, must identify the perpetrators. This includes the full extent of their support and affiliation with other state and non-state actors, and their sources of funding, sanctuaries, training and recruitment. Who is perpetrating the murder of our children – and who is supporting this murder? This must be identified transparently and accurately. The AIHRC calls on the United Nations to pledge immediately to identifying the perpetrators – root and branch; and to publishing a

---

1. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) recognizes and protects the right of persons belonging to minorities. (article 27 "[i]n those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, or to use their own language..."); UN Minorities Declaration (resolution 47/135); The Human Rights Committee’s general comment No. 23 (1994) on the rights of minorities; The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (article 2); International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (article 1)

2. A/RES/601/, para 138 & 139
report within 60 days.

6. **A Security Council resolution.** The Security Council should issue a resolution recognising yesterday’s massacre of school children, recognising the prevalence of War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity in Afghanistan, and committing to identifying and holding perpetrators of such crimes to account; as well as commitment to preventing such massacres from repeating, and taking further steps to protect civilians from harm.

7. **An international, inter-governmentally mandated Commission of Inquiry into Civilian Casualties.** Secretary General António Guterres should call for an inquiry into civilian casualties which have occurred as a result of a variety of types of violence and in a variety of places – including mosques, gurdwaras, hospitals, schools, universities and tutoring centres. This Commission should look comprehensively and intersectionally at the violence Afghans from all parts of the country and from all backgrounds have been subjected to, as well as the particular ways ethnic groups, regions and genders have been targeted. Secretary General Guterres should communicate the United Nations intentions and commitment to this inquiry as soon as possible, outlining an actionable timeline.

8. **Mechanisms and funding for reparations and documentation.** As troops withdraw Global North governments, including the US, and NATO member states including the UK, Germany, and the Netherlands, should set an example by ensuring that they leave in place mechanisms for reparations and documentation. The includes ensuring records of official tribunals, courts, truth commissions, and investigations of human rights violations, as well as safeguarding reports and documentation generated, and evidence collected.

9. Finally, communities in Dasht-e-Barchi must be listened to; the community’s grief, questions and demands must be heard. Most of the families are amongst the poorest. The Government should dispatch a team to the community to attend to the families’ economic circumstances ensuring they receive, without legal complication, benefits owed to them. In addition, these children have the right to be listed on the official list of victims held by the Ministry of Martyrs and the Disabled. It has come to the attention of the AIHRC that in previous attacks, such as that of Kabul University, Kawsar Danish and Barchi Maternity Hospital, families had difficulty registering children and women due to arcane provisions in the Disabled and Martyrs Law – this should come to an end effective immediately. The parents of these children have the right that their children be named, and memorialised, in such a manner. The Government should take every step to ensure they are able to do so.

As with all incidents of serious civilian casualties, AIHRC’s Special Investigations Team is carrying out documentation to gather evidence and collect testimonies.