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COUNTRY CONDITIONS EXHIBITS DEMONSTRATING THE TARGETING OF MEMBERS OF CERTAIN PROFESSIONS IN AFGHANISTAN

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Introduction

The Taliban is an Islamic fundamentalist, militant, and political group operating in Afghanistan that was officially formed in 1994. The Taliban was in power from 1996-2001. The Taliban is characterized by a strict adherence to extreme cultural and religious practices and it has used extreme violence in order to achieve its aim of establishing a fundamentalist government in Afghanistan. Under Taliban rule, human rights abuses were rampant in Afghanistan and draconian measures were implemented to ensure compliance with Taliban ideologies. Historically disenfranchised groups bore the brunt of the Taliban's abuses of rights.

Historically, freedom of expression has been a limited right in Afghanistan but improvements had been made since the overthrow of the Taliban government in 2001 with women being allowed to engage in journalistic activities and multiple news outlets being allowed to operate. Under Taliban rule, serious restrictions have been placed on free expression and the media, including violence against journalists and censorship. Furthermore, access to education has also been limited, with teachers being threatened for teaching certain groups and or certain topics.

In 2021, U.S. and NATO forces began to withdraw from Afghanistan and the Taliban launched an offensive which has resulted in the overthrow of the U.S. and NATO backed government. Since then, the Taliban has taken control of the government and the entire country leading to fears that the changes that have been implemented by the western-backed government will be reversed and the plight of disenfranchised groups in Afghanistan will worsen. Given that the Taliban is in control of the government and the country, persecuted groups cannot safely relocate within Afghanistan to escape said persecution.

PART I: THE TALIBAN IS IN CONTROL OF AFGHANISTAN	
Source	Relevant Information
A	United States Department of State, "2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Afghanistan," Available at: Afghanistan - United States Department of State The Taliban culminated its takeover on August 15 when Kabul fell to their forces. On September 7, the Taliban announced a so-called interim government made up almost

	<p>entirely of male Taliban fighters, clerics, and political leaders, hailing from the dominant Pashtun ethnic group.</p> <p>The Taliban promoted a strict interpretation of Quranic instruction according to the Hanafi school of Sunni jurisprudence, seeking to eliminate secular governance.</p>
B	<p>Congressional Research Service, "Taliban Government in Afghanistan: Background and Issues for Congress," <i>Available at: R46955 (congress.gov)</i></p> <p>On September 7, 2021, the Taliban announced a “caretaker government” to rule Afghanistan. The announcement came weeks after the Taliban, a Sunni Islamist extremist movement that ruled most of Afghanistan from 1996 until 2001, retook effective control of the country with the collapse of the U.S.-backed former Afghan government and its security forces amid the U.S. military departure.</p> <p>Afghanistan is different in many ways from the country the Taliban last ruled in 2001. Women have been active participants in many parts of Afghan society; protections for them, and ethnic and religious minorities, were enshrined in the country’s 2004 constitution. The Taliban are likely to reverse that progress.</p>
<p>PART II: TARGETING OF JOURNALISTS</p>	
C	<p>United States Department of State, "2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Afghanistan," <i>Available at: Afghanistan - United States Department of State</i></p> <p>HRW reported that between August 15 and October 1, the Taliban arrested at least 32 journalists. Most were given warnings regarding their reporting and released, but some were beaten. In a September 10 statement, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) stated that on September 7 and 8, the Taliban beat and detained protesters, including women, and up to 20 journalists, two of whom were beaten severely.</p> <p>Between August 15 and December 14, UNAMA documented nearly 60 apparently arbitrary detentions, beatings, and threats of activists, journalists, and staff of the AIHRC, attributed to the Taliban.</p> <p>Journalists reported a chilling effect on free speech and press in the country as a result of the Taliban’s policies, particularly following media reports of torture of two local journalists covering women’s protests after the Taliban takeover. The Taliban announced restrictive media regulations in September and additional guidelines in November, in line with the Taliban’s strict interpretation of sharia.</p> <p>The Taliban insurgency continued to threaten, attack, and kill journalists and media organizations. The Taliban warned media would be targeted unless they stopped broadcasting what it called “anti-Taliban statements.”</p> <p>Many media workers fled to safe havens starting in January after the Taliban launched a campaign of violence against journalists in late 2020, as reported by UNAMA and independent media. Taliban violence continued to escalate against journalists throughout the year, and frequent reports of attacks continued after their occupation</p>

	<p>of the country in August. According to the UNESCO observatory of killed journalists, seven journalists were killed between January 1 and August 8, including four women.</p>
D	<p>Human Rights Watch, "Afghanistan: Taliban Threatening Provincial Media." (Mar. 7, 2022) <i>Available at:</i> Afghanistan: Taliban Threatening Provincial Media Human Rights Watch (hrw.org)</p> <p>Taliban authorities have carried out far-reaching censorship and violence against Afghan media in district and provincial centers, drastically limiting critical reporting in Afghanistan.</p> <p>Journalists in the provinces have described Taliban members threatening, detaining, and beating them and their colleagues who were trying to report the news. Many journalists have felt compelled to self-censor and report only Taliban statements and official events.</p> <p>"Taliban harassment and attacks on journalists outside major urban areas have largely gone unreported, causing media outlets in outlying provinces to self-censor or close altogether," said Fereshta Abbasi, Afghanistan researcher at Human Rights Watch. "In many provinces, the Taliban have virtually eliminated reporting on a wide range of issues."</p> <p>"We all fear for our safety," a reporter in Baghlan said. "If something happens to a journalist, there is no institution or system to support them, or to seek justice. There is no support for the media workers in Afghanistan right now."</p>
E	<p>Amnesty International, "Bitter Memories and Unknown Future: What will happen to the Free Press in Afghanistan?" (May 4, 2022) <i>Available at:</i> Bitter Memories and Unknown Future: What will happen to the Free Press in Afghanistan? - Amnesty International</p> <p>The protests were held in different parts of Kabul. My colleague Nemat Naqdi and I went to PD-3 (Police District-3) of Kabul to cover the protest. We started filming when women gathered and started the protest, but the Taliban tried to stop us and simply told us not to film. We asked about their reason but received no answer. After that, one of them took me to the PD. Before entering the PD, I thought they had brought me to talk and negotiate but I soon realized what awaited me: I was tortured until I fainted. They kept me in one of the rooms of the PD for four hours. I fainted several times and would regain consciousness when they would spray cold water on my face.</p>
F	<p>BBC News, "Afghanistan: Journalists tell of beatings by Taliban." (Sept. 9, 2021) <i>Available at:</i> Afghanistan: Journalists tell of beatings by Taliban - BBC News</p> <p>Afghanistan's Tolo news agency reported that its cameraman had been arrested and held by the Taliban for nearly three hours.</p> <p>The CPJ, an international non-governmental organisation, said at least 14 journalists had been detained and then released over the past two days.</p>
<p>PART III: TARGETING OF TEACHERS</p>	

G	<p>Education International, "Afghanistan: The Taliban regime must stop its attacks on the teaching profession." (June 3, 2022) <i>Available at:</i> Afghanistan: The Taliban regime must stop its attacks on the teaching profession (ei-ie.org)</p> <p>In what appears to be an attempt to purge the country’s education system from any independent voice, Afghan universities were recently asked to denounce the “corrupt, incompetent and destructive” teachers within their ranks. The letter from the authorities also commands higher education institutions to report any teacher or professor who had connection with previous governments.</p>
H	<p>Amnesty International, "Afghanistan: Taliban must allow girls to return to school immediately – new testimony." (Oct. 13, 2021) <i>Available at:</i> Afghanistan: Taliban must allow girls to return to school immediately – new testimony - Amnesty International</p> <p>Pashtana*, a high school teacher, told Amnesty International she received death threats from the Taliban and had been called to the local court for prosecution due to her prior teaching of co-educational sports.</p> <p>Another secondary school teacher said the Taliban had subjected her to harassment and intimidation, in retaliation for a media interview in which she complained about teacher salaries and girls’ access to secondary education. She added that she and several other teachers were threatened with eviction from their homes, which the previous government had provided.</p>