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Discrimination, Detention, and Deportation: Immigration & Refugees

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Appendix: Letters

Executions and Enforced Disappearances in Afghanistan under the Taliban

Taliban fighters patrol in Kabul, Afghanistan, August 19, 2021. 2021 AP Photo/Rahmat Gul, File

The Taliban have told my family that my brothers are on a list. They searched our house and arrested my older brother. He was released after two days, but during those days my younger brother was arrested and till now we don't know where he is, how he is, if he is alive.

This report documents the summary execution or enforced disappearance of 47 former members of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) military personnel, police, intelligence service members, and paramilitary militia who had surrendered to or were apprehended by Taliban forces between August 15 and October 31, 2021. The report focuses on Ghazni, Helmand, Kandahar, and Kunduz provinces, but the cases reflect a broader pattern of abuses reported in Khost, Paktiya, Paktika, and other provinces.

This report is based on a total of 67 interviews, including 40 in-person interviews conducted in Ghazni, Helmand, Kunduz, and Kandahar provinces. Human Rights Watch's research indicates that Taliban forces have killed or forcibly disappeared more than 100 former security force members in just these four provinces in the three months since their takeover of Kabul, the Afghan capital, on August 15. They have also targeted family members of former security force members.

Summary killings and enforced disappearances have taken place despite the Taliban's announced amnesty for former government civilian and military officials and reassurances from the Taliban leadership that they would hold their forces accountable for violations of the amnesty order.

In the weeks before the Taliban overran Kabul, revenge killings, including the targeting of government officials, were already on the increase in major cities and along key highways. This was evident in July, when Taliban forces escalated their operations around Kandahar city and carried out summary executions of surrendered and captured members of the security forces. Similar patterns have emerged in many other provinces, including since August 15.

The Taliban, through their intelligence operations and access to employment records that the former government left behind, have identified new targets for arrest and execution. Baz Muhammad, originally from Paktika province, had been employed in Kandahar by the National Directorate of Security (NDS), the former state intelligence agency. Around September 30, Taliban forces came to his house in Kandahar city and arrested him; relatives later found his body. The murder, about 45 days after the Taliban had taken over the country, suggests that senior officials ordered or were at least aware of the killing. These continuing executions have generated fear among former government officials and others who might have believed that the Taliban takeover would bring an end to the violence characteristic of the armed conflict.

The Taliban leadership has directed members of surrendering ANSF units to register with them to receive a letter guaranteeing their safety. Under this amnesty program, individuals who have registered have been screened for ties to particular military, police, militia, and special forces units, or to commanders or former provincial authorities, in addition to being required to surrender weapons. However, the Taliban have used these screenings to detain and summarily execute or forcibly disappear individuals within days of their registration, leaving their bodies for their relatives or communities to find.

Many Afghans interviewed expressed fear that if they register with the Taliban to receive the amnesty letter, they might be identified or recognized and face violent retaliation. At the same time, the Taliban have also searched for and detained people who failed to register. Some former government and security force officials have relied on their personal connections to get letters from the Taliban via third persons. Others, including some former civil servants in key government posts, such as the judiciary, have been unaware that they could obtain this forgiveness letter and have faced punishments including beatings and detention for not having done so. Even if aware of the letters, many have not been sure how to obtain them where the Taliban have not announced specific registration centers.

In smaller Afghan towns and villages, residents tend to know each other within communities and established neighborhoods. Because of these relationships, the Taliban, even when not from the area, have been able to obtain information as well as identify individuals who have worked for the previous government. These people have been singled out for questioning or further investigation and some have been summarily executed or forcibly disappeared. Those executed on the spot often included lower-level security force members who were less well-known or lacked the protection of tribal leaders, especially in the south.

The Taliban have also searched for known former security force members, often threatening and abusing family members to reveal the whereabouts of those in hiding. Some of those eventually apprehended have been executed or taken into custody without acknowledgment of their detention or their location, the crime of enforced disappearance.

Enforced disappearances are defined under international human rights law as the arrest or detention of a person by the authorities followed by a refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of liberty, or to reveal the persons fate or whereabouts. Enforced disappearances violate a range of fundamental rights protected under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,^[1] which Afghanistan has ratified, including prohibitions against arbitrary arrest and detention; torture and other ill-treatment; and extrajudicial execution.

Previous Afghan governments, including that of President Ashraf Ghani, extensively used enforced disappearances against their opponents. The Taliban have also engaged in abusive search operations, including night raids, to apprehend and, at times, forcibly disappear suspected former civilian and security force officials. Said a civil society activist from Helmand province:

These killings and disappearances have occurred amid other violence in the country. The Islamic State of Khorasan Province (ISKP), an affiliate of the Islamic State (ISIS), has continued to carry out targeted killings and bombings to which the Taliban have responded with intensified search operations and detentions in districts where it is operating. The collapse of the former administration has resulted in a rise in criminal activity and score-settling, including violence against prominent local officials.

Taliban officials have repeatedly denied that their forces have carried out killings and disappearances. However, as Taliban forces consolidate control over the country, they are obligated to hold to account all members of their forces responsible for human rights abuses. Increasing evidence suggests that summary executions and disappearances, among other abuses, are being carried out by senior Taliban leadership at the district or provincial level.

Following the Taliban takeover of Helmand and Kandahar provinces, senior commanders from the Taliban's intelligence unit sought to apprehend prominent former ANSF commanders and fighters for detention and questioning; some of them are among those forcibly disappeared. Qudratullah, a well-known police commander in Kandahar city, was arrested by Taliban intelligence officers shortly after the city's takeover. His family has been unable to obtain any information from the Taliban as to his whereabouts. Human Rights Watch is increasingly concerned that revenge killings condoned by senior Taliban leaders are now becoming the basis for a deliberate policy to seek out and execute targeted former governments security officials and others.

On September 21, the Taliban announced the establishment of a commission to investigate reports of human rights abuses, corruption, theft, and other crimes. As of November 22, the commission had not announced any investigations into any reported killings, although it did report on the arrest of several Taliban members for stealing and the dismissal of others for corruption.

Human Rights Watch, on November 7, provided its findings on executions and disappearances to Taliban officials and sought information about any investigations into these cases. The Taliban responded to say that all detentions and punishments follow a judicial process, and that no one is punished without a court [ruling]. They said individuals have been detained not for past deeds, but [because] they are engaged in new criminal activities [and] create problems and plots against the new administration, [and] keep contacts with notorious individuals who fled the country. It is not our policy to kill someone without trial, whether he is from ISIS or from another group. Their full response, including some additional details on the investigation commission, is included as an appendix to this report.

Arbaki A local militia force.

ALP Afghan Local Police, a local security force set up and funded by the US from 2010 to 2020.

ANA Afghan National Army.

ANP Afghan National Police.

ANSF Afghan National Security Forces (an umbrella term covering the military, police, intelligence agency, and designated local militias of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan).

Delgai Small group, Taliban military units under lower-level commanders who often have direct knowledge of local political dynamics.

IEA Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, the formal name of the Afghan state under the Taliban

Republic Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the Afghan government from January 26, 2004, until August 15, 2021.

KPF Khost Protection Force, a US CIA-backed paramilitary strike force based in Khost.

NDS National Directorate of Security, the intelligence agency of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, created by the CIA in 2002.

Patsun kawanki Uprising forces, a militia force formerly supported by the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

Sara kheta Red unit, the Taliban's elite special forces.

Human Rights Watch carried out research for this report between September and November 2021. The report is based on a total of 67 interviews, including 40 in-person interviews conducted in Ghazni, Helmand, Kandahar and Kunduz provinces. We interviewed witnesses to abuses, relatives and friends of victims, former government officials, members of the media, and healthcare workers, as well as Taliban fighters, commanders, and officials.

All interviewees were informed of the purpose of the interview, the ways in which the information would be used, and offered anonymity in our reporting. Most interviews were conducted in Dari or Pashto. This report withholds identifying information for most interviewees to protect their privacy and security. In some cases, we have used pseudonyms, which appear in quotation marks, to anonymize individuals for their security. None of the interviewees received financial or other incentives for speaking with us.

On November 7, 2021, Human Rights Watch sent a summary of our findings to the Taliban authorities in Kabul. Their response is included as an appendix to this report.

Taliban forces had stepped up targeted killings of ANSF personnel and civilian government officials long before their final offensive that led to the takeover of the country in mid-August 2021. The UN and other analysts placed the surge in killings from mid-2020.^[2] While most of these attacks targeted security force personnel and other officials, the period from late 2020 through August 2021 also saw increased attacks on journalists and civilians considered to be associated with the government. As the Taliban forces closed in on provincial capitals, targeted killings and other abuses escalated.

In the immediate aftermath of the collapse of President Ashraf Ghanis government, Taliban forces moving into Kabul appeared to adopt two approaches to exerting control. The takeover of the presidential palace and key ministries happened with little violence, as the buildings had been abandoned when government officials fled. However, in other parts of the city, Taliban forces engaged in revenge attacks. In early September well after the Taliban had taken over the city Taliban fighters took four policemen from their homes and summarily shot them.^[3] One resident, who remains in hiding from the Taliban, said:

A man in Kandahar described a typical encounter when the Taliban came looking for his brother, who was with the ANSF:

People seeking to gain favor with the new authorities or take revenge on rivals may report them to the Taliban. On October 11, the Afghan filmmaker Roya Heydari accused neighbors of informing Taliban authorities in Mazar-e Sharif that her brother had been a security force member. He was later released after officials close to former Governor Atta Noor intervened.^[6]

Despite Taliban denials, the nature of the killings indicates that local Taliban commanders carried out or ordered many of the executions or followed orders to do so by senior commanders or the Taliban's intelligence unit. In some provinces, Taliban commanders have said that they have lists of people written or orally communicated who have committed acts the Taliban deem unforgivable and would be targeted.^[7] The pattern of the killings has sown terror throughout Afghanistan, as no one associated with the former government can feel secure they have escaped the threat of reprisal.

The Ghani government collapsed so quickly that documents related to the security forces and those who cooperated with them were left behind. When Taliban forces entered the offices of the former intelligence agency, the National Directorate of Security, and other government offices, they were able to obtain not only data on employees but also information on those who might have acted as informants.

Many of those killed were evidently targeted because of their role in the previous government. A Taliban fighter said that Muhammad, the head of the disciplinary unit of Kunduz's prison, was executed on August 30 in front of us:

Others targeted across Afghanistan have included NDS members, including intelligence personnel, those in charge of detention facilities, and special strike forces members such as the Zero units.^[9] On August 13, the day Taliban forces took control of Kandahar, they captured and killed three NDS 03 unit officers, according to former colleagues who saw the bodies.^[10] Zamaryali, a former 03 force member, said, They were telling me not come out after the collapse of the government. Suddenly, their phones were turned off. I went to their homes. All three of them had been killed by the Taliban, their families told me.^[11]

Since October, the Taliban have intensified searches for former members of the Khost Protection Force (KPF), a special forces unit that had been founded and supported by the US Central Intelligence Agency. A civil society activist who has been documenting the killings said, the KPF are the [Talibans] first target. They are looking for them.^[12]

Others targeted have been members of militias supported by the former government, in particular, the Afghan Local Police (ALP). One Kandahar resident said, The Taliban have not forgiven a lot of ALP commanders. Right now, they are looking for them.^[13] A Taliban commander in Ghazni said that some ALP and other militia members cannot be forgiven because they have committed a lot of atrocities.^[14] Because many people joined the ALP from their own communities, the Taliban also see them as a greater threat compared to locally deployed former ANSF members who were community outsiders. The Afghanistan Analysts Network noted in October 2020:

At the local level, many Taliban fighters and former ANSF members come from the same communities and know each other. As a result, personal rivalries and grievances have played into some killings. Many have reportedly been ordered by the Taliban's *delgai* (small group) units lower-level commanders who often have direct knowledge of the local political dynamics and are able to identify and target

people.[\[16\]](#)

The Taliban so-called *sara kheta* (red unit) elite special forces, highly trained commandos organized on a provincial basis, have also reportedly been tasked with searching for former security force members during night raids. The *sara kheta* are considered responsible for the Taliban's most successful operations against the ANSF in recent years.[\[17\]](#)

Taliban forces have executed former members of local paramilitary forces operating under the ANSF umbrella known by a variety of names, such as *arbaki* or *patsun kawanki* (uprising forces). Human Rights Watch is aware of at least one instance in which the Taliban executed detained former militia members in groups of 6 to 10. Like the Afghan Local Police, such militia forces had long earned the enmity of Taliban forces in their districts because of their abuses against communities perceived to support the Taliban or because they were rivals in exploiting these communities, and sometimes both.[\[18\]](#)

Taliban killings and enforced disappearances have varied by district and province, the type of ANSF personnel targeted, and by time period. More opportunistic killings characterized the period immediately before and after the Taliban takeover of Kabul. Killings and disappearances appear to have become more deliberate since then, as Taliban commanders, especially at the provincial level, have used informants and information from the previous government to locate others linked to the former Afghan security forces. In some cases, the connection between the victims and the former government is not evident.

Kandahar province stood out in the months before the collapse of the Ghani government as a target for Taliban revenge killings. Before and after the Taliban takeover, Taliban fighters went from house to house in some areas telling men to come in for questioning. Among the first killed were former members of the security forces. Since then, the killings and disappearances have continued.

Those most at risk include people who worked for the former government and those known to have had close personal ties or working relationships with government officials, civilian as well as military. One man reported that his friend, Hikmat, a security guard by profession, was picked up by the Taliban on September 25, 2021, in Kandahar city. The Taliban beat him severely and he died as a result. His friend believes his past informal relationships with government officials he occasionally sat and talked with them made him a Taliban target.[\[19\]](#)

A friend of Lali, who ran a bicycle shop near the Abdul Rab Akhundzada mosque in Kandahar, described his abduction. The Taliban picked him up on September 26 from his shop, and the next day we found his body in the city street.[\[20\]](#) He had been severely beaten. The friend said that a Taliban official denied killing Lali, but a local shopkeeper and another witness had seen the Taliban pick him up from his shop.

Witnesses said they saw Hikmat and Lali being taken away from the middle of Kandahar city by official Taliban vehicles.

On September 23, 2021, Taliban fighters apprehended Assad and Omar, two brothers who had been working at the US base outside Kandahar city known as Gecko, although not as soldiers. At time of writing, their whereabouts are unknown.[\[21\]](#)

The Taliban summarily executed some former security force members in front of their families or have left their bodies where they were likely to be found. Others who were well known for fighting against the Taliban are among those forcibly disappeared. This includes key colleagues of former Kandahar provincial chief of police Gen. Abdul Raziq, such as Ayub Kakai, one of Raziq's top commanders.[\[22\]](#) The Taliban took him into custody in late August 2021 and have held him incommunicado since. Haji Lala, former chief of police of Maiwand district of Kandahar, was arrested by the Taliban in late August 2021; he was also held incommunicado even though his family had asked to meet with Taliban officials seeking information about his whereabouts. On November 13, both Lala and Kakai were released following negotiations between Taliban officials and local tribal leaders.[\[23\]](#)

Social media attention in one case appears to have prevented an enforced disappearance. On September 11, Taliban forces raided the home of Haji Melad Rahmati, a former NDS official, in Kandahar city. His sister, Fahima Rahmati, used social media to alert her network about the raid, pleading for help, and her posts went viral. Haji Melad Rahmati said:

After the incident, Taliban social media accounts claimed that the reason for the raid was that Haji Melad Rahmati had not registered with the Taliban.

Dadullah had spent only a few months with the Kandahar police, but this was apparently enough to attract the notice of local Taliban commanders. He had been working in Kandahar city's District 9, but as the fighting worsened, he quit his job and went to work as a laborer in Spin Boldak on the Pakistan border. He stayed there after the Taliban's takeover of the country and the following two months. On October 23, he returned to Kandahar city where neighbors saw him at his house in Tamanyano Kalay in District 9. Two men believed to be Taliban members were seen standing with him and then escorted him to their car and drove away with him. Taliban security forces dress distinctively, are visibly armed, and are the only group to have the power and control to have carried out an arrest in the area. One of the neighbors said, Later that evening an ambulance brought his dead body to the house. We took the body to the [provincial] governor's house, but the Taliban would not tell us anything and did not allow us to meet the governor.[\[25\]](#)

Ahmadullah was from the Arghandab district of Kandahar province where he had served as a police commander at checkpoints across Kandahar city and its surroundings.[\[26\]](#) Taliban security forces took him into custody in mid-October 2021. In a 29-second video apparently recorded by a Taliban fighter obtained by Human Rights Watch, a Taliban fighter speaks of Ahmadullah as being responsible for killing the brother of one of the fighters present in the room.[\[27\]](#) The speaker says that the brother doesn't want to let him [Ahmadullah] go. In the video, Ahmadullah is lying on the ground. There are no injuries visible, but he is not moving, his eyes are closed, and he appears unconscious. As of November 22, no further information was available about Ahmadullah's fate or whereabouts.

Nazim, a former member of the Afghan Local Police, surrendered to the Taliban along with other former members of his unit after the collapse of the Ghani government. A Taliban *sara kheta* special forces unit took Nazim along with other militia fighters to Nahri Sufi village in Char Dara district. When they reached the village, according to a militia member, Nazim cursed at the Taliban, and a few minutes later he was separated from [the rest of the unit] and then [name withheld] fatally shot Nazim. The two men came from the same village and were known to have had a bitter rivalry in the past.[\[28\]](#)

Ziaul was an NDS commander responsible for guarding a checkpoint in Ibrahim Khail village in Kunduz province. After the governments collapse, Ziaul went into hiding in Kunduz city. He tried to leave Kunduz but, according to a friend of his, He was followed from his house and arrested at the Logir checkpoint in Aliabad district. The Taliban told him, There is no forgiveness for people like you.[29] His family found his body in the Angorbagh area of Kunduz city on the main road. As Ziaul had been a commander of a frontline checkpoint, he had fought the Taliban for many years. The Taliban knew him well as they had lost many fighters during attacks on his checkpoint. Neighbors believe he was targeted not only because he had been with the NDS but because local Taliban commanders knew him personally from past interactions.[30]

Abdul Qadir was a fighter under Ziauls NDS command. His family said he had gone into hiding after the government fell, but went to his in-laws house, which was in a known Taliban stronghold. Around August 25, Taliban forces stopped him at a checkpoint and asked him if he had worked for the NDS. He said he was a former NDS member but pointed out the general amnesty the Taliban leadership had announced. According to a witness at the checkpoint, When they stopped him, they asked for weapons. He told them he did not have any, but they took him with them anyway.[31]

The family said that three days later they found his body on the banks of the Char Dara River.[32]

Watan had been with the Afghan Local Police in Kunduz province where he had been accused of brutality against Taliban suspects. He was well-known in Kunduz and would have been known to the Taliban. While he was traveling by bus to Kabul in late August, the Taliban stopped him at a checkpoint in Kunduz. A witness on the bus said a Taliban fighter at the checkpoint fatally shot him on the spot.[33]

After the Taliban took control of Lashkargah, the capital of Helmand province, on August 13, they declared a general amnesty for the population.[34] They announced the amnesty via mosques, word of mouth, and social media. Nonetheless, the Taliban proceeded to forcibly disappear large numbers of people who had worked for the previous government, particularly members of the Afghan National Police, Afghan Local Police, intelligence agencies, and militias. Taliban authorities have not provided information about the whereabouts of many of those taken into custody, particularly those who were in *sangoryan*, led by well-known commander Muhammad Rasulyan, and other militias, and the ALP. Their whereabouts remain unknown.

Taliban forces in Helmand have continued searching for both civilian and military personnel affiliated with the former government, in particular senior commanders.

Abdul Raziq was one of the last ANSF commanders fighting against the Taliban after the collapse of Kabul. He fought Taliban forces in Gereshk and then in Sohrab at the former Camp Bastion, where he finally surrendered on August 15. The Taliban allowed him to go to his home in Gereshk, but when he arrived that night, another group of Taliban warned him that commanders and fighters might want to hurt him if they knew where he was hiding. After that warning, Abdul Raziq went with his nephew, Mudasir, who is himself a Taliban commander, to the Deh Adam Khan area of Gereshk district. A local resident said, Abdul Raziq was there for two or three days, until another group claiming to be from the Talibans intelligence department took Abdul Raziq with them at night. Since then, we do not know about his whereabouts.[35]

Zaman Gul had been with a prominent militia under commander Muhammad Rasulyan in Gereshk and in Herat province. After August 15, he laid low in his home in Gereshk until the general amnesty. One of his friends said that soon after he came out of hiding sometime on August 22-24, Taliban intelligence raided his house and Zaman was taken out from his home, handcuffed and had to go with them.[36] His father and brothers searched for him but were unable to get any information. Said his friend: When they went to the district governor or district chief of police, [Taliban officials] told them that he was in Musa Qala, or Sangin district, and recently the family was told [by a Taliban official] that he is in Nawzad.[37] The Taliban have provided no more information about his whereabouts, and there is no proof whether he is alive or not.

Baz Muhammad had been a member of the Afghan Local Police before joining the Afghan National Police in Helmand. After the governments collapse, he returned to his home in Gereshk. Sometime between August 20 and August 25, the Taliban raided his house and took him away. His father went to Sangin and Nawzad districts because Taliban officials in Gereshk told him he was in prison there, but Taliban officials denied having him in custody.[38]

Ghafoor, a former police officer from Gereshk, stayed home after the governments collapse. Around August 12, two days after taking over the Gereshk bazaar, Taliban intelligence officials raided Ghafoors house at night and arrested him. Taliban officials informed the family that he was being taken to Gereshk prison and then after three days they said he had been moved to the prison in Lashkar Gah, Helmands provincial capital. Since then, the family has not been given any further information about his whereabouts and has not been able to have contact him.[39]

Maween, a low-ranking Afghan National Police commander in Gereshk district, had been implicated in brutality. After the Taliban took Helmand, he went into hiding in Gereshk. After a couple of days, he tried to flee wearing a womans burqa, but the Taliban captured him in a raid. His whereabouts remain unknown.[40]

Around August 20, the Taliban detained at least 23 men from several districts in Ghazni province and killed them in groups of five or six or more. The men had been members of various Afghan security forces or militias, including the Afghan Local Police, *patsun kawanki*, and others.

Taliban fighters in Ghazni have claimed that all 23 people executed had been provided amnesty in their districts, but they left those districts and went to Ghazni city. In Ghazni, they were arrested, and the [Taliban] court ordered them to be executed.[41] A Taliban fighter said, These were all people who once, twice, or three times surrendered to us [before], and we forgave them, but they came back and fought us again and again. So, the court ordered their deaths.[42] However, families of the victims questioned whether any court could have heard the cases in such a short time and that even if a court were involved it would not have had time to meaningfully consider evidence or otherwise apply fair trial standards.

A hospital official said that they received 23 bodies that were all *patsun kawanki*, which were collected from different areas of Ghazni

province and brought to the hospital.^[43] The men were identified by their ID cards and by family members as coming from Maqur, Qarabagh, Gilan, and other districts of Ghazni province.

On October 12, Taliban forces detained ALP commander Allah Dad Halimi from his home in Maqur district. Halimi was also a district governor for several districts in Ghazni. The family found his body the next day.^[44]

After Ghazni fell to the Taliban, Sadaat, a well-known commander in uprising forces and the ALP, kept to his home out of fear. Eventually, he began to move around. His cousin said that Sadaat's confidence grew and one day in mid-October he went to the bazaar on his motorcycle. We were waiting at home. Three hours were gone, he was not back.^[45] After some time, other residents of the area brought his body to the house. They told his cousin that armed men they believed were Taliban had stopped him on the road and killed him.^[46]

The Taliban leadership in Kabul has officially distanced itself from the summary killings, arbitrary arrests, and enforced disappearances that have occurred since taking over the Afghan government. In addition to denying having ordered such abuses, the leadership has also issued statements that seem to directly prohibit some of these actions. It has disseminated these via social media and other public messaging. In these statements, the Taliban have not only downplayed evidence of targeted killings but disavowed any role that the leadership may have played.

On September 21, 2021, the Taliban announced the formation of a commission to purge from the Taliban ranks anyone identified as having personal enmity, being involved in corruption, immorality, violation of people's rights, harassment, theft and robbery, or other wrongdoings.^[47] On September 24, the acting minister of defense, Mullah Mohammad Yaqoob, said that there had been isolated reports of unauthorized executions.

In response to a letter from Human Rights Watch setting out our findings, the Taliban said they had removed from their ranks 755 members found to have committed such acts and had established a military tribunal for those accused of murder, torture, and illegal detention. They also said that executions of people taken into custody were not allowed unless decided by a Sharia court.^[48]

Zabihullah Mujahid, the Taliban's official spokesperson, has used Twitter to issue Taliban statements, including some on security, and to contest allegations that Taliban forces have been targeting opponents.

This report was written by a consultant to Human Rights Watch and Patricia Gossman, associate Asia director at Human Rights Watch. Brad Adams, executive director of the Asia Division, edited and provided divisional review. James Ross, legal and policy director, provided legal review; and Joseph Saunders, deputy program director, provided program review. Editorial and production assistance was provided by Racquel Legerwood, senior coordinator for the Asia Division, and Travis Carr, senior publications coordinator. The report was prepared for publication by Jose Martinez, senior coordinator, and Fitzroy Hepkins, administrative manager.

Human Rights Watch wishes to thank all those in Afghanistan who agreed to be interviewed. We have honored their requests for anonymity.

^[1] International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), G.A. res. 2200A (XXI), 21 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 16) at 49, U.N. Doc. A/6316 (1966), 993 U.N.T.S. 3, entered into force January 3, 1976. Afghanistan ratified the ICCPR in 1983.

^[2] United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Special Report: Killing of Human Rights Defenders, Journalists and Media Workers in Afghanistan 2018-2021, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/special_report_-_killing_of_human_rights_defenders_and_journalists_2018-2021_-_unama_-_14_february_2021_english_0.pdf, (accessed November 2, 2021).

^[3] Human Rights Watch interview with the victims' relatives, Kabul, September 18, 2021. The four were killed in the same area of Kabul.

^[4] Human Rights Watch interview with a Taliban commander, Kunduz, October 23, 2021.

^[5] Human Rights Watch interview with the victims' family, Kandahar province, October 18, 2021.

^[6] @heydari_roya, In these past few years, I helped so many people, IDPs, refugees, and I worked voluntarily for several charity organizations - I worked for #Afghanistan from the bottom of my heart and asked for nothing in return!

But now, I am asking only for one favour, *Twitter*, October 11, 2021, 5:44 p.m., https://twitter.com/heydari_roya/status/1447679523361787904?s=20. Her brother was later released after officials close to former governor Atta Noor intervened. @heydari_roya, Words are not enough to thank Ustad Attas family for helping our family to release my brother from the custody of the Taliban. A special thanks to @KhalidNoorafg May God bless you!, *Twitter*, October 13, 2021, 11:06 a.m., https://twitter.com/heydari_roya/status/1448304219094671360?s=20, (accessed November 17, 2021).

^[7] Human Rights Watch interview with a Taliban commander from Ghazni, Kabul, August 16, 2021.

^[8] Human Rights Watch interview with a Taliban fighter, Kunduz province, September 7, 2021.

^[9] Before the drawdown of most international forces from Afghanistan in 2014, the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) began expanding the number of Afghan paramilitary units fighting the Taliban and other insurgents. While these forces were nominally under the Afghan government's National Directorate of Security (NDS), they operated outside the normal chain of command of the Afghan National Security Forces as part of CIA-backed covert operations. Such so-called Zero units included NDS 01, which operated in Kabul and Wardak, and sometimes Nangarhar; NDS 02, which operated in Nangarhar; NDS 03, originally known as the Kandahar Strike Force, based in the former compound of the late Taliban leader Mullah Omar, renamed Gecko after US forces occupied it, in Kandahar; and NDS 04 in Kunar and Nuristan. See Human Rights Watch, *They've Shot Many Like This, Abusive Night Raids by CIA-Backed Afghan*

Strike Forces (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2019), https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/afghanistan1019_web.pdf.

[10] Human Rights Watch interview with the former NDS 03 unit commander, Kandahar Province, September 6, 2021. The Taliban had targeted these units early in their offensive. See Afghanistan: Mounting Taliban Revenge Killings, Human Rights Watch news release, July 30, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/07/30/afghanistan-mounting-taliban-revenge-killings>.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Human Rights Watch interview with a civil society activist in Afghanistan via Signal, November 4, 2021.

[13] Human Rights Watch interview with a resident, Ghazni province, October 21, 2021.

[14] Human Rights Watch interview with a Taliban commander, Ghazni province, August 29, 2021.

[15] Kate Clark, Disbanding the ALP: A dangerous final chapter for a force with a chequered history, *Afghanistan Analysts Network*, October 20, 2020, <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/reports/war-and-peace/disbanding-the-alp-a-dangerous-final-chapter-for-a-force-with-a-chequered-history/>, (accessed November 5, 2021).

[16] The Taliban's smallest operating unit is the *delgai* (diminutive form of *dala*, or group), which in theory consists of 10 men but in reality can have from five to 20. The *delgai* leader typically collects the men under him by way of kinship ties, informal bonds forged through years of war and sometimes charisma. The *delgai* leader plans assaults, and the group conducts most of the attacks in its area of operation. Anand Gopal, The Battle for Afghanistan: Militancy and Conflict in Kandahar, *New America*, 2010, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep10483>, (accessed November 7, 2021).

[17] Fazelminallah Qazizai, The Special Units Leading the Taliban's Fight Against the Islamic State, *New/Lines Magazine*, September 3, 2021, <https://newlinesmag.com/reportage/the-special-units-leading-the-talibans-fight-against-the-islamic-state/>, (accessed November 4, 2021); Frud Bezhan, Explainer: Taliban 'Special Forces Unit' Bursts Into Spotlight with Deadly Attacks, *Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty*, December 4, 2017, <https://www.rferl.org/a/afghanistan-taliban-special-forces-emerge-deadly-attacks/28896629.html>, (accessed November 4, 2021).

[18] Human Rights Watch, *Just Dont Call it a Militia: Impunity, Militias, and the "Afghan Local Police,"* (New York: Human Rights Watch 2011, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/afghanistan0911webwcover_0.pdf, (accessed November 3, 2021).

[19] Human Rights Watch interview with a friend of Hikmat, September 28, 2021.

[20] Human Rights Watch interview with a friend of Lali, September 28, 2021.

[21] Human Rights Watch interview with a former NDS 03 member, Kandahar province, September 25, 2021.

[22] Human Rights Watch Interview with a former government employee, Kandahar province, September 11, 2021.

[23] Other senior commanders who were released included Syed Sharif Sartib, Sardar Khan, Mahmood Aka, Attaullah Mama, and Haji Sab Jan. All are prominent figures with powerful tribal and political ties that gave them protection. @tolokanews, .

., *Twitter*, November 13, 2021 6:59 a.m., <https://twitter.com/tolokanews/status/1459491182007013382?s=20>, (accessed November 16, 2021).

[24] Message passed to Human Rights Watch from acquaintance of Rahmati, October 13, 2021.

[25] Human Rights Watch interviews with a neighbor of the victim, Kandahar province, October 23, 2021.

[26] Human Rights Watch interviews with residents, Arghandab, October 21, 2021.

[27] Video obtained by Human Rights Watch, October 25, 2021. The Taliban sometimes film videos of detentions and killings to share on their social media networks.

[28] Human Rights Watch interview with a former militia member, Kunduz province, October 11, 2021.

[29] Human Rights Watch interview with a witness who accompanied Ziaul to the checkpoint, [location withheld]. October 15, 2021.

[30] Human Rights Watch interviews with neighbors, Kunduz, October 15, 2021.

[31] Human Rights Watch interview with witness who accompanied Abdul Qadir to the checkpoint, Kunduz, October 15, 2021.

[32] Human Rights Watch interview with a relative of Abdul Qadir, Kunduz, October 22, 2021.

[33] Human Rights Watch interview with a witness, Kunduz, October 16, 2021.

[34] The Helmand amnesty was announced two days before and separate from the general amnesty the Taliban leadership announced in Kabul for former Afghan government officials and military personnel after taking Kabul on August 15.

[35] Human Rights Watch interview with a villager, Helmand province, September 6, 2021.

[36] Human Rights Watch interview with a friend of Zaman Gul, Helmand province, September 2, 2021.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Human Rights Watch interview with a relative of Baz Mohammad, Helmand province, September 8, 2021.

[39] Human Rights Watch interview with a member of Ghafoors family, [location withheld], October 2, 2021.

[40] Human Rights Watch interview with family members who witnessed the raid and with a witness who saw Maween when he was trying to flee, Gereshk, October 26, 2021.

[41] Interview with a humanitarian aid worker, Ghanzi province, October 29, 2021.

[42] Human Rights Watch interview with a Taliban commander, Ghazni province, September 6, 2021.

[43] Human Rights Watch interview with a health care worker, Ghazni province, November 5, 2021.

[44] Human Rights Watch interview with a journalist, Ghazni province, October 9, 2021.

[45] Human Rights Watch interview with a cousin of the victim, Ghazni province, October 9, 2021.

[46] Ibid.

[47] @Zabehulah_M33, : <https://justpaste.it/5og7q>, *Twitter*, September 21, 2021, 3:09 p.m., https://twitter.com/Zabehulah_M33/status/1440392816669040653?s=20, (accessed November 17, 2021). However, following media coverage of the detention and torture of two journalists on September 7-8, 2021, Taliban authorities announced that they would investigate the incident. @MJalal313, Acting Minister of Information and Culture to Al Araby: We believe in freedom of expression within principles. There are always problems in the beginning. We have begun an investigation into the incident in which journalists were physically assaulted while covering the protests. *Twitter*, September 11, 2021, 10:47 a.m., <https://twitter.com/MJalal313/status/1436702996147183618?s=20>. However, in a meeting with the newspapers editor, two members of the Talibans media committee, Sarujullah Omari and Hujatullah Mujadidi, said the newspaper itself was responsible for covering an illegal protest. Sudarsan Raghavan, As an Afghan newspaper struggles to survive, a brutal beating and a Taliban apology, *Washington Post*, September 17, 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/afghanistan-journalists-taliban/2021/09/17/81b44d5a-1722-11ec-a019-cb193b28aa73_story.html, (accessed November 17, 2021).

[48] Email to Human Rights Watch from Abdul Wahid Rayan, adviser & spokesperson for the Ministry of Information and Culture, November 21, 2021.

[49] @Zabehulah_M33, <https://justpaste.it/8foej>, *Twitter*, August 15, 2021, 3:00 a.m., https://twitter.com/Zabehulah_M33/status/1426800950749110275?s=20, (accessed November 17, 2021).

[50] @Zabehulah_M33, <https://justpaste.it/645y1>, *Twitter*, August 15, 2021, 9:56 a.m., https://twitter.com/Zabehulah_M33/status/1426905752782966786?s=20 (accessed November 17, 2021).

[51] @Zabehulah_M33, .

. *Twitter*, August 15, 2021, 1:46 p.m., https://twitter.com/Zabehulah_M33/status/1426963402992373761?s=20, (accessed November 17, 2021).

[52] @Zabehulah_M33, . . *Twitter*, August 16, 2021, 7:54 a.m., https://twitter.com/Zabehulah_M33/status/1427237251352776705?s=20, (accessed November 17, 2021).

[53] Human Rights Watch interviews with humanitarian organizations, Kabul, September 2021.

[54] @Zabehulah_M33, <https://justpaste.it/5v32g>, *Twitter*, September 5, 2021, 7:33 a.m., https://twitter.com/Zabehulah_M33/status/1434479686021754882?s=20, (accessed November 17, 2021).

[55] @Zabehulah_M33, #:

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., *Twitter*, September 13, 2021, 1:00 p.m., https://twitter.com/Zabehulah_M33/status/1437461255640465414?s=20, (accessed November 17, 2021).

Raids Target Former Police, Intelligence Officers

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