

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL – PUBLIC STATEMENT

8 October 2018

## European states should stop forcing people to danger in Afghanistan

Ahead of a week of action across Europe, Amnesty International calls on European governments to stop forcibly sending people to deadly conditions in Afghanistan. The recent dramatic increase in returns of Afghan asylum-seekers have put thousands of people at a real risk of serious human rights violations in contravention of the binding international legal principle of *non-refoulement*, which prohibits states from transferring anyone to a place where they are at real risk of serious human rights violations.

Despite demonstrably deteriorating security and humanitarian situation in Afghanistan over the past two years and the record number of civilian casualties, European countries have stepped up the deportations of Afghan nationals arguing that areas of the country are “safe” – in stark contrast to the developments on the ground.

### Security and humanitarian situation in Afghanistan since October 2017<sup>1</sup>

#### Civilian casualties

In December 2017, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Aid (UNOCHA) described the conflict in Afghanistan as having ‘escalated into a war’<sup>2</sup> between the Afghan government and several Anti-Government Elements (AGEs), with the Taliban and Daesh/’Islamic State-Khorasan Province (ISKP) being the groups responsible for most of the attacks against civilians. Today, Taliban is in control of or has presence in more provinces than was the case in the past 17 years since they were removed from power.<sup>3</sup> Violent attacks against civilians, as well as frequent territorial gains and losses in the fight between various AGE and government forces, have resulted in record numbers of civilian casualties and internal displacement.

The war in Afghanistan has affected lives in multiple ways. In addition to physical insecurity, Afghans have suffered socially, economically and psychologically. Without any prospect of peace on the horizon, Afghans are now at risk in every corner of the country. Public places, such as schools, hospitals, markets, sports grounds and

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<sup>1</sup> This Public Statement is a brief follow-up to our [report](#) “Forced Back to Danger: Asylum-seekers returned from Europe to Afghanistan”, Index: ASA 11/6866/2017, October 2017

<sup>2</sup> UN OCHA, *Humanitarian Needs Overview 2018*, December 2017, [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/afg\\_2018\\_humanitarian\\_needs\\_overview\\_1.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/afg_2018_humanitarian_needs_overview_1.pdf), p. 5

<sup>3</sup> BBC News, Taliban Threaten 70% of Afghanistan, 31 January 2018, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-42863116>

clubs, mosques and even funeral ceremonies, have been targeted. According to UN figures released in July 2018, 1,692 people were killed, and 3,430 injured in the first six months of the year – more than at any comparable period since records began being compiled a decade ago. Between January and September, 12 journalists were killed, marking the deadliest year for the media in Afghanistan.

Following the withdrawal of the international community and security transition, Taliban and other anti-government elements have stepped up their offensive in several key provinces. In the past three years, Kunduz, Farah, Faryab, Helmand, Kabul, Nangarhar and recently Ghazni, have been attacked, with significant losses of human lives. Many people have fled from their homes, while those who remain live in daily fear of Taliban and Daesh and in precarious social and economic circumstances.<sup>4</sup>

Kabul has turned to be the most insecure city in Afghanistan. Indeed, in August 2018, UNHCR stated that Kabul was no longer a safe internal flight alternative for those fleeing conflict or persecution in their area of origin.<sup>5</sup>

As the threat from the Taliban and Daesh grows, civilians are increasingly limited in enjoying their rights and are at continuous risk of persecution by both Taliban and Daesh, as well as pro-government forces.<sup>6</sup> Fearing for their safety, journalists have no alternative than to self-censor their reporting. Civilians who speak out against the AGEs or in favour of the government risk being targeted.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, pro-government forces routinely perpetrate human rights abuses, including deliberate killings, extortion and intimidation, making human rights violations a widespread phenomenon. Women living in AGEs-controlled areas have severely limited freedom of movement, and those who hold jobs in the public sphere face frequent threats.<sup>8</sup> Children are recruited to carry out suicide attacks or forced to act as spies for the AGEs.<sup>9</sup> Between 14 April and 10 May 2018, UNAMA recorded 23 election-related

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<sup>4</sup> BBC News, *Why Afghanistan is more dangerous than ever*, 14 September 2018, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-45507560>

<sup>5</sup> UNHCR – UN High Commissioner for Refugees, *UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan*, 30 August 2018, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/5b8900109.html>

<sup>6</sup> UNHCR – UN High Commissioner for Refugees, *UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan*, 30 August 2018, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/5b8900109.html>

<sup>7</sup> UNHCR, *UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan*, 30 August 2018, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/5b8900109.html>; Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan, *Media Watch Annual Report 2017*, December 2017,

<http://nai.org.af/files/documents/mw/annual/Annual%20report%20English%20version%202017.pdf>; UNAMA, *Afghanistan: Annual Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict 2017*, February 2018, [https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/afghanistan\\_protection\\_of\\_civilians\\_annual\\_report\\_2017\\_final\\_150218.pdf](https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/afghanistan_protection_of_civilians_annual_report_2017_final_150218.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> UNHCR, *UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan*, 30 August 2018, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/5b8900109.html>; ICC, *Situation in Afghanistan, Summary of the Prosecutor's Request for Authorisation of an Investigation Pursuant to Article 15*, 20 November 2017, [https://www.icc-cpi.int/itemsDocuments/Afghanistan/171120-afgh-art\\_15-app-summ\\_ENG.pdf](https://www.icc-cpi.int/itemsDocuments/Afghanistan/171120-afgh-art_15-app-summ_ENG.pdf), para. 20; European Asylum Support Office (EASO), *Afghanistan Individuals targeted under societal and legal norms*, December 2017, [https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/Afghanistan\\_targeting\\_society.pdf](https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/Afghanistan_targeting_society.pdf), p. 36

<sup>9</sup> UNHCR, *UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan*, 30 August 2018, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/5b8900109.html>

incidents, where targeted attacks were carried out on schools and mosques being used as voter registration centres.<sup>10</sup> Sectarian motivated suicide attacks targeted at the Shi'a Muslim population continued in 2018,<sup>11</sup> and several attacks took place around other places where many civilians gather.<sup>12</sup>

## Humanitarian crisis

Afghanistan is a site of an acute humanitarian crisis. Beyond the threat of serious harm to life, many Afghans feel increasingly strained by the consequences of the decades-long conflict; economic hardship, internal displacement, life-changing injuries, loss of breadwinning family members and persistent psychological trauma.<sup>13</sup> More than one third of all children is reportedly struggling with psychological stress because of the decades-long war.<sup>14</sup>

Food insecurity is a growing issue, as the conflict impacts on both food production as well as incomes. Frequent natural disasters, such as pest attacks, drought and mudslides only exacerbate the already volatile situation.<sup>15</sup> Three in ten children are suffering from acute malnutrition, and child mortality rates remain among the highest in the world.<sup>16</sup>

Despite of the fact that Afghanistan has a legislation in place to address domestic violence, poverty, strong patriarchal values and poor access to education continue to drive Afghanistan's high child marriage rates. Cultural practices such as bride price, child engagements (where children are engaged before birth), exchange marriages (between girls from two separate families) and the practice of 'baad'<sup>17</sup>, contribute to

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<sup>10</sup> UNAMA, *Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: Election-Related Attacks and Abuses during the Initial Voter Registration Period*, 10 May 2018 [https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/protection\\_of\\_civilians\\_-\\_special\\_report\\_-\\_election-related\\_attacks\\_and\\_abuses\\_may\\_2018\\_english\\_3.pdf](https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/protection_of_civilians_-_special_report_-_election-related_attacks_and_abuses_may_2018_english_3.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> UNAMA, *Midyear Update on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 1 January to 30 June 2018, 15 July 2018*, [https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unama\\_poc\\_midyear\\_update\\_2018\\_15\\_july\\_english.pdf](https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unama_poc_midyear_update_2018_15_july_english.pdf); For a report on the development of attacks on places of worship, see: UNAMA, *Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: Attacks against places of worship, religious leaders and worshippers*, 7 November 2017,

[https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unama\\_report\\_on\\_attacks\\_against\\_places\\_of\\_worship\\_7nov2017\\_0.pdf](https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unama_report_on_attacks_against_places_of_worship_7nov2017_0.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> RFE/RL – Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, *Playing Fields, Sports Clubs, Gyms Becoming Afghanistan's Bloody New Battlegrounds*, 12 September 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/playing-fields-sports-clubs-gyms-becoming-afghanistan-s-bloody-new-battlegrounds/29485880.html>, see the Annex for an overview of security related incidents with 10 or more civilian deaths in the first 8 months of 2018

<sup>13</sup> UN OCHA reports that in 2017 a 21 per cent increase in trauma was reported, *Humanitarian Needs Overview 2018*, December 2017, [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/afg\\_2018\\_humanitarian\\_needs\\_overview\\_1.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/afg_2018_humanitarian_needs_overview_1.pdf); Human Rights Watch, *No Safe Place – Insurgent Attacks on Civilians in Afghanistan*, 8 May 2018, [https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report\\_pdf/afghanistan0518\\_web\\_1.pdf](https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/afghanistan0518_web_1.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> UN OCHA, *Humanitarian Needs Overview 2018*, December 2017, [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/afg\\_2018\\_humanitarian\\_needs\\_overview\\_1.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/afg_2018_humanitarian_needs_overview_1.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> SOFREP, *Drought in Afghanistan: Worst in Recent History*, 31 July 2018, <https://sofrep.com/106550/drought-in-afghanistan-worst-in-recent-history>; UN OCHA, *Humanitarian Needs Overview 2018*, December 2017,

[https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/afg\\_2018\\_humanitarian\\_needs\\_overview\\_1.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/afg_2018_humanitarian_needs_overview_1.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> UN OCHA, *Humanitarian Needs Overview 2018*, December 2017,

[https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/afg\\_2018\\_humanitarian\\_needs\\_overview\\_1.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/afg_2018_humanitarian_needs_overview_1.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> 'baad': method of settlement and compensation whereby a female from the criminal's family is given to the victim's family as a servant or a bride

the high prevalence of child marriage and low value assigned to girls in Afghan society. Child marriage has also been linked to the trafficking of girls<sup>18</sup>.

Child labour is an ongoing challenge in Afghanistan. Children are exposed to labour exploitation and forced to work in harsh conditions, facing frequent abuse<sup>19</sup>. Many families cannot afford sending children to school due to the costs of school supplies and because children's earnings are sometimes necessary to help the struggling families survive.<sup>20</sup> The quality of education is at risk due to the conflict and prolonged humanitarian crisis. Many schools had to close due to security issues, and others are struggling to accommodate all children. The school system is unable to absorb the more than 300,000 children of school age that are among the returnees.<sup>21</sup>

With another 140 health facilities closed down by armed groups between May and August 2018, two million people now struggle to get access to health care.<sup>22</sup> Cost and low quality of the healthcare are mentioned as the biggest obstacles accessing healthcare. Thirty one per cent of 2017 returnees reported having trouble accessing healthcare. Internally Displaced People (IDPs) face even greater obstacles, with 42 percent unable to obtain treatment.<sup>23</sup>

### **Precarious Conditions for Returnees in Afghanistan**

Against this backdrop, different challenges become apparent as the large numbers of returnees from European countries try to reintegrate in the country they had left so many years ago, or where they had never lived before. According to UNHCR and International Organisation for Migration (IOM), 40 per cent of the returnees do not manage to return to their area of origin.<sup>24</sup> Returnees and IDPs alike struggle to gain access to livelihood opportunities, food, shelter and reclaim land and property.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> UNAMA, OHCHR, *Harmful Traditional Practices and Implementation of the Law on Elimination of Violence against Women in Afghanistan*, 2010,

[https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/harmful\\_traditional\\_practices\\_english.pdf](https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/harmful_traditional_practices_english.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/afghanistan>

<sup>20</sup> UN OCHA, *Humanitarian Needs Overview 2018*, December 2017,

[https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/afg\\_2018\\_humanitarian\\_needs\\_overview\\_1.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/afg_2018_humanitarian_needs_overview_1.pdf); IRIN, *As conflict spreads, chronic displacement becomes powderkeg in Afghanistan*, 9 April 2018,

<http://www.irinnews.org/feature/2018/04/09/conflict-spreads-chronic-displacement-becomes-powderkeg-afghanistan>;

Human Rights Watch, *I won't be a doctor and one day you'll be sick*, 17 October 2017,

<https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/10/17/i-wont-be-doctor-and-one-day-youll-be-sick/girls-access-education-afghanistan>;

Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR), *Afghanistan: Children or Brides?*, 7 August 2018; <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/afghanistan-children-or-brides>

<sup>21</sup> UN OCHA, *Humanitarian Needs Overview 2018*, December 2017,

[https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/afg\\_2018\\_humanitarian\\_needs\\_overview\\_1.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/afg_2018_humanitarian_needs_overview_1.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> UN OCHA, *Humanitarian Bulletin Afghanistan Issue 77 1-30 June 2018*, 24 July 2018,

<https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/afghanistan-humanitarian-bulletin-issue-77-1-30-june-2018>; UN OCHA,

*Humanitarian Needs Overview 2018*, December 2017,

[https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/afg\\_2018\\_humanitarian\\_needs\\_overview\\_1.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/afg_2018_humanitarian_needs_overview_1.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> UNHCR, *Returnee and Internally Displaced Persons Monitoring Report*, May 2018,

<https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/64059>

<sup>24</sup> IOM and UNHCR, *Returns to Afghanistan*, 18 February 2018,

[http://afghanistan.iom.int/sites/default/files/Reports/joint\\_returnee\\_report\\_iom\\_unhcr\\_final.pdf](http://afghanistan.iom.int/sites/default/files/Reports/joint_returnee_report_iom_unhcr_final.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), Samuel Hall and Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), *Escaping War: Where to Next?*, January 2018, <http://www.internal->

Large numbers of returnees end up settling in informal settlements in the cities and suburbs, whether by choice, or due to better job perspectives. Many cannot return to their area of origin because of insecurity or because their relatives have also left, leaving them without the essential support network.<sup>26</sup> The majority of households in urban areas in Afghanistan live in slums, informal housing or sub-standard settlements.<sup>27</sup> Kabul's population grew from 1.5 million in 2001 to an estimated six million in 2018,<sup>28</sup> leaving those who live in informal settlements even more vulnerable..

Considering the importance of networks and family in all aspects of life in Afghanistan, successful reintegration of returnees and IDPs is dependent on the extent to which they can rely on family ties and hospitality.<sup>29</sup> As such, reintegration is extra challenging for those born outside Afghanistan.<sup>30</sup> Much is dependent on an individual to adjust to the local norms, as diverging norms and values and a more liberal life style have proven to be further challenges to reintegration.<sup>31</sup>

In April 2018, an Afghan young man who was forcibly returned from Germany committed suicide in a hotel room in Kabul.<sup>32</sup> Another returnee was injured in a large-scale attack in Kabul.<sup>33</sup> In September, a man suffering from depression who was returned to Afghanistan two years ago by the United Kingdom was killed by the Taliban in his hometown Maidan Wardak.<sup>34</sup>

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[displacement.org/sites/default/files/publications/documents/20180124-NRC-IDMC-SamuelHall-escaping-war-where-to-next.pdf](http://www.internal-displacement.org/sites/default/files/publications/documents/20180124-NRC-IDMC-SamuelHall-escaping-war-where-to-next.pdf), p. 6

<sup>26</sup> IDMC, Samuel Hall and NRC, *The Invisible Majority*, December 2017, <http://www.internal-displacement.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/20171214-idmc-afghanistan-case-study.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> Central Statistics Organization, *Afghanistan Living Condition Survey 2016-2017: Highlights Report*, 2018, [http://cso.gov.af/Content/files/Surveys/ALCS/Final%20English%20ALCS%20Highlight\(1\).pdf](http://cso.gov.af/Content/files/Surveys/ALCS/Final%20English%20ALCS%20Highlight(1).pdf), p. 2, 10;

IDMC, Samuel Hall and NRC, *Escaping War: Where to Next?*, January 2018, <http://www.internal-displacement.org/sites/default/files/publications/documents/20180124-NRC-IDMC-SamuelHall-escaping-war-where-to-next.pdf>, p.9

<sup>28</sup> IRIN, *As conflict spreads, chronic displacement becomes powderkeg in Afghanistan*, 9 April 2018, <http://www.irinnews.org/feature/2018/04/09/conflict-spreads-chronic-displacement-becomes-powderkeg-afghanistan>

<sup>29</sup> EASO, *Afghanistan Networks*, January 2018,

[https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/Afghanistan\\_Networks.pdf](https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/Afghanistan_Networks.pdf) p. 13; IDMC, Samuel Hall and NRC, *The Invisible Majority*, December 2017, <http://www.internal-displacement.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/20171214-idmc-afghanistan-case-study.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> EASO, *Afghanistan Networks*, January 2018,

[https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/Afghanistan\\_Networks.pdf](https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/Afghanistan_Networks.pdf), p. 14

<sup>31</sup> Oxfam, *Returning to fragility: Exploring the link between conflict and returnees in Afghanistan*, 31 January 2018, <https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/returning-fragility-exploring-link-between-conflict-and-returnees-afghanistan>, p. 12;

EASO, *Afghanistan Individuals targeted under societal and legal norms*, December 2017, [https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/Afghanistan\\_targeting\\_society.pdf](https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/Afghanistan_targeting_society.pdf), p. 92-107; Migration Policy Institute, *From forced migration to forced returns in Afghanistan: Policy and program implications*, November 2017 <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/forced-migration-forced-returns-afghanistan>

<sup>32</sup> Amnesty International, *Afghanistan: Record civilian casualties make returns unjustifiable*, 17 July 2018, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/press-releases/2018/07/afghanistan-record-civilian-casualties-returns-unjustifiable/>

<sup>33</sup> Al Jazeera, *Refugees Deported by Europe attacked by Taliban, ISIL*, 4 February 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/02/refugees-deported-europe-attacked-taliban-isil-180203080943505.html>

<sup>34</sup> Independent, *Afghan father who sought refuge in UK 'shot dead by Taliban' after being deported by Home Office*, 13 September 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/zainadin-fazlie-deport-home-office-taliban-afghanistan-shot-dead-refugee-a8536736.html#ampf=undefined>

## European countries step up forcible returns to Afghanistan

Despite the progressive deterioration of the security situation in Afghanistan, in the last three years several European states have increased the returns of Afghans who did not obtain refugee status or other forms of international protection.<sup>35</sup> The actions and policies of the EU and European governments towards Afghan asylum-seekers are in stark contrast to the objective facts on the ground in Afghanistan.

One key factor would appear to be political developments in Europe. In 2015, a large number of people reached Europe irregularly – over one million. Approximately 20 percent of them were from Afghanistan. Although these numbers are small compared to the millions of Afghan and other refugees living in countries like Iran and Pakistan, the EU and many national governments in Europe responded by actively trying to prevent more asylum-seekers from arriving irregularly on European soil, and to increase the number of returns of those who did not obtain refugee status or other forms of international protection.

It is in this context that, in October 2016, the European Union and Afghanistan concluded an agreement (“EU-Afghanistan Joint Way Forward”) that aims to facilitate the return of Afghan nationals from all European Member States to Afghanistan. Notwithstanding the Joint Way Forward’s rhetoric of solidarity and cooperation, in fact the agreement puts pressure on Afghanistan to accept large numbers of returns.

To carry out these returns, European countries have arbitrarily called some areas of Afghanistan “safe,” relying on the idea of an “Internal Flight Alternative” (IFA). In other words, the authorities recognise that the person’s province of origin is dangerous but expect them to live elsewhere in the country. For example, several European countries consider Kabul to be a safe place; however, the city has turned to be the most insecure city in Afghanistan, and the UNHCR recently stated that Kabul was no longer a safe internal flight alternative for those fleeing conflict or persecution in their area of origin.<sup>36</sup>

According to the statistical office of the EU (Eurostat) 9,480 people were returned to Afghanistan in 2016, and 6,620 people in 2017. Though in 2017 there has been a decrease of returns in comparison to 2016, they are still more than double the figure in 2015 (3,290). This despite a significant decrease in the number of Afghans applying for asylum in the EU: 43,325 Afghans submitted their asylum claim in 2017<sup>37</sup>, compared to 182,780 in 2016 (-76%)<sup>38</sup>. An even lower number of applications

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<sup>35</sup> Amnesty International, *Forced back to danger. Asylum-seekers returned from Europe to Afghanistan*, 4 October 2018, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa11/6866/2017/en/>

<sup>36</sup> UNHCR – UN High Commissioner for Refugees, *UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan*, 30 August 2018, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/5b8900109.html>

<sup>37</sup> EUROSTAT, *Asylum applicants in the EU 2017*, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/news/themes-in-the-spotlight/asylum2017>

<sup>38</sup> EUROSTAT, *Asylum applicants in the EU 2016*, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/news/themes-in-the-spotlight/asylum2016>

is expected for 2018, as in the first eight months only 16,800 Afghans applied for asylum in the EU.<sup>39</sup>

Afghan nationals are returned either forcibly or through to so-called “voluntary returns” (Assisted Voluntary Returns/AVRs), which are less coercive than forced returns but nonetheless are compulsory, as they also follow an order to leave the host country. Those who accept to return through the AVR procedure are entitled to reintegration assistance upon arrival in Afghanistan. Providing financial and logistical support to someone who must leave the host country may be helpful, but it is misleading to label these returns as “voluntary”, as there is no possibility for those who accept the AVR procedure to remain in the host country.

Afghanistan is deeply unsafe, and has become more so in recent years. Yet, European countries continue to return increasing numbers of Afghans in the last two years, even as the violence escalates. At present, given the grave security and human rights situation across the country, all returns to Afghanistan constitute refoulement. For the principle of non-refoulement to be breached, it is not necessary for serious harm to ensue: the human rights violations take place when someone is returned to a real risk of such harm. European governments have remained wilfully blind to the dangers to which returnees are exposed, and – together with the EU – are putting Afghanistan under tremendous pressure to accept large numbers of returnees. Prioritising deportations, headless of evidence, is reckless and illegal.

Amnesty International is calling on all European countries to implement a moratorium on returns to Afghanistan until they can take place in safety and dignity. The organization also recommends that UNHCR call for such a moratorium. In addition, Amnesty International urges the Government of Afghanistan and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) not to cooperate with the returns of people from Europe to Afghanistan.

### **Annex: A selection of attacks in Afghanistan causing more than ten civilian victims in 2018 (January-September 2018)**

12 SEPTEMBER: A suicide bombing at a demonstration against a police chief in the province of Nangarhar killed at least 68 people and wounded 165.<sup>40</sup>

5 SEPTEMBER: following a suicide attack by Islamic State (IS) fighters at a sports center in Kabul, there are at least 26 casualties and 91 injured. Two journalists are killed in a second bombing at the same place.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> EUROSTAT, Asylum quarterly report, 20 September 2018 : <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/pdfscache/13562.pdf>

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/09/afghanistan-suicide-bomber-kills-32-attack-protesters-180911132240204.html>

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.bangkokpost.com/news/world/1535214/twin-blasts-turn-regular-kabul-wrestling-session-into-massacre>

15 AUGUST: A suicide attack on an educational center in Kabul kills 34 people, including many teenagers. IS claims responsibility.<sup>42</sup>

10 AUGUST: 20 civilian deaths occur during the Taliban's attack to Ghazni province.<sup>43</sup>

3 AUGUST: 39 people are killed and more than 80 are injured, including children, in a suicide attack on a Shiite mosque in Gardez, province of Paktia.<sup>44</sup>

1 AUGUST: An explosion in a mosque in the city of Herat kills at least 29 people and injured 64.<sup>45</sup>

JULY 31: A suicide bombing in the center of Jalalabad kills 15 people and injures 15 others. On the same day, 12 people in the western Farah province are killed by a roadside bomb.<sup>46</sup>

JULY 23: A suicide bombing kills at least 23 and injures 107 people at the entrance to Kabul International Airport. IS claims responsibility.<sup>47</sup>

JUNE 17: At least 18 people die in a suicide attack in Jalalabad, one day after a suicide bomber killed 36 people during the Festival of Sacrifice in Nangarhar Province. IS claims responsibility.<sup>48</sup>

9 MAY: Suicide bombers from both IS and Taliban kill at least 15 people in three separate attacks in Kabul. That same day, six police officers die during an air raid, probably by the American army.<sup>49</sup>

30 APRIL: 36 persons die in a double suicide attack in Kabul and the province of Khost, including nine journalists. IS claims responsibility.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/08/afghanistan-student-massacre-is-a-war-crime/>

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2018/08/13/120-afghan-forces-civilians-killed-battle-taliban.html>

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.yahoo.com/news/suicide-bomb-attack-afghan-shiite-mosque-kills-25-113712373.html>

<sup>45</sup> <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/afghanistan-terror-attack-jawadia-mosque-herat-shia-isis-suicide-bomb-a7871751.html>

<sup>46</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-45022014>

<sup>47</sup> [http://afghanistan.asia-news.com/en\\_GB/articles/cnmi\\_st/features/2018/07/23/feature-02](http://afghanistan.asia-news.com/en_GB/articles/cnmi_st/features/2018/07/23/feature-02)

<sup>48</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/06/suicide-attack-afghanistan-nangarhar-kills-10-180617111812856.html>

<sup>49</sup> <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/05/09/series-blasts-hit-kabul-suicide-bombers-gunmen-attack-afghanists/>

<sup>50</sup> <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/04/30/photo-journalist-among-dead-twin-kabul-suicide-blasts-kill-least/>



22 APRIL: In an IS suicide attack at an electoral office in Kabul, 57 people are killed and 119 people are injured.<sup>51</sup>

APRIL 2: According to a report from the UN, 30 children are killed and 51 injured during an air raid by the Afghan army in Kunduz.<sup>52</sup>

21 MARCH: More than 30 people, mostly teenagers, are killed when a IS suicide bomber blows himself up during an Afghan New Year party.

27 JANUARY: An ambulance carrying explosives explodes in a busy street in Kabul, with more than 95 civilians killed and 158 wounded. The Taliban claim the responsibility of the attack.<sup>53</sup>

24 JANUARY: IS militants attack the office of aid organization Save the Children in Jalalabad. Five people are killed, dozens are injured.<sup>54</sup>

21 JANUARY: 22 foreigners and Afghans are killed in an attack by the Taliban at the Intercontinental Hotel in Kabul.<sup>55</sup>

*Sources: Reuters, Tolonews, Aljazeera, Guardian, BBC, New York Times, Telegraph*

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<sup>51</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/at-least-31-afghans-killed-in-kabul-by-suicide-bomber-official-says/2018/04/22/30174d76-4615-11e8-9072-f6d4bc32f223\\_story.html?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.a287c6eea1e6](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/at-least-31-afghans-killed-in-kabul-by-suicide-bomber-official-says/2018/04/22/30174d76-4615-11e8-9072-f6d4bc32f223_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.a287c6eea1e6)

<sup>52</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/afghanistan-air-raid-killed-children-un-says-1.4651836>

<sup>53</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-42843897>

<sup>54</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/24/world/asia/save-the-children-afghanistan.html>

<sup>55</sup> [https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/21/world/asia/afghanistan-hotel-attack.html?action=click&contentCollection=Asia%20Pacific&module=RelatedCoverage&region=Marginalia&pg\\_type=article](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/21/world/asia/afghanistan-hotel-attack.html?action=click&contentCollection=Asia%20Pacific&module=RelatedCoverage&region=Marginalia&pg_type=article)