RO KHANNA
17TH DISTRICT, CALIFORNIA

COMMITTEE ON
ARMED SERVICES
Subcommittee on Intelligence,
Emerging Threats, and Capabilities
Subcommittee on Strategic Forces
COMMITTEE ON
THE BUDGET
COMMITTEE ON
OVERSIGHT AND REFORM
Subcommittee on Economic
and Consumer Policy
Subcommittee on Government Operations

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0517

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April 28th, 2020

The Honorable Mike Pompeo
Secretary of State
Washington, DC 20520

The Honorable Chad F. Wolf
Acting Secretary of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

The Honorable Joseph Wilson
United States Embassy (Kabul)
Chargé d'Affaires
Wilson Bibi Mahru Kabul, Afghanistan

Secretary Pompeo, Secretary Wolf and Ambassador Wilson,

Thank you for your leadership in trying to bring about an end to the two-decades long war in Afghanistan. It is long past time that we end this war, which has cost our nation thousands of lives and trillions of dollars.

As U.S. forces complete our departure from Afghanistan, I am deeply worried about the health and safety of Sikhs, Hindus, and other religious minorities under threat of religious persecution and genocidal violence in Afghanistan.

Just last month, a terrorist organization linked to an ISIS affiliate killed 25 Sikh worshipers in Kabul, including a four-year-old girl named Tanya Kaur. During her funeral service, a bomb was detonated, and additional explosives were planted outside their Sikh house of worship. The terrorist group presented the mourners an ultimatum: leave Afghanistan within ten days or suffer more attacks.

Unfortunately, persecution of religious minorities in Afghanistan and the neighboring region is nothing new, nor uncommon. In 2018, a terrorist group carried out a suicide bombing on a

convoy of Afghan Hindus and Sikhs that were on their way to meet with Afghan President Ashraf Ghani that killed 19 people and injured 20 others.

There are deeply troubling reports of ties between the Pakistan's InterServices Intelligence and the terrorist organizations that carried out the 2018 and 2020 attacks, which warrant thorough investigation.

According to the U.S. State Department and U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), Afghan Sikhs and Hindus experience systemic religious discrimination. This persecution takes the form of restrictions on religious practices, illegal theft of their property, bullying of children, and judicial bias. There are approximately 200 Hindu and Sikh families left in Afghanistan.

The U.S. proposed resettling 18,000 refugees in this fiscal year, including up to 5,000 individuals who are persecuted for their religion or other protected grounds. Additionally, up to 7,500 individuals can be referred to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) by a U.S. embassy in any location.

Because the rampant religious violence against Afghan Sikhs and Hindus poses an existential threat for them, I urge the U.S. Embassy in Kabul to refer Sikhs and Hindus still in Afghanistan for emergency refugee protection under the USRAP and for the Department of State and Department of Homeland Security to accept this referral without objection to ensure their safety.

Given the 20-year U.S. presence in Afghanistan, we are in a unique position to help alleviate the suffering of the most vulnerable people who suffer relentless religious persecution. Therefore, I urge you to pay attention to the dire situation facing the Afghan Sikhs and Hindus and other religious minorities facing persecution, and to enact the suggested policy to protect these innocent people.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Ro Khanna
Member of Congress

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

June 5, 2020

The Honorable Ro Khanna
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Khanna:

Thank you for your April 28, 2020 letter to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). The Acting Secretary asked that I respond on his behalf.

The Department of State (DOS) is responsible for the overall management of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP), including establishing access to the program, consistent with the allocations authorized in the annual Presidential Determination. Once a case has been accepted for processing in the USRAP and prepared for interview, it is referred to DHS for adjudication to determine eligibility for refugee resettlement to the United States.

Regarding your concerns about Afghan Sikhs and Hindus, DHS would consider any referrals of such individuals to the USRAP by a U.S. embassy and interview any individuals properly referred for resettlement consideration. However, it is important to note that USRAP processing requires multiple and often lengthy steps, including intensive security vetting of applicants. For this reason, the program is not well-suited to situations calling for emergency protection measures to assist individuals at risk of imminent harm.

Additionally, the current environment poses several challenges for conducting refugee status interviews in Afghanistan for the foreseeable future. Given that there is no USRAP infrastructure in place in Afghanistan and approval by the Government of Afghanistan must be obtained in order to establish such an infrastructure, as well as restrictions on travel in light of the security situation in Afghanistan and the COVID-19 pandemic, it is unlikely DHS could send a team of officers to interview in Afghanistan this year even if DOS chose to refer such cases to DHS for interview and adjudication.

Thank you for your interest and recommendations. We will always work with Congress and other appropriate stakeholders on this important issue. Should you require any additional assistance, please have your staff contact the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Office of Legislative Affairs at (202) 272-1940.

Sincerely,

Joseph Edlow
Deputy Director for Policy