



# New Afghan refugees' situation in Gulshar town October 2000 – January 2001

## Report

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**Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) report on  
New Afghan refugees' situation in Gulshar town  
October 2000 - January 2001**

**MSF Mashhad (Khorassan province) - Islamic Republic of Iran**

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**1/ Context of the study**

The city of Mashhad accommodates an important community of Afghan refugees. The township of Gulshar in its suburbs has a population estimated at more than 80.000 inhabitants, of which approximately half of them are Afghans. Their settlement in Iran follows the history of different waves of refugees who fled their country over the last 22 years of war.

Since 1996, MSF has been delivering health care to the refugees in a clinic of Gulshar. Over the second half of the year 2000, MSF team has observed among its patients an increase of the flux of newcomers from Afghanistan. In parallel, different Iranian official sources admitted recently that at least 500 persons per day could enter illegally in Iran through its eastern border.

Living conditions have deteriorated steadily in Afghanistan over the past year. The populations have suffered from the cumulated effects of a drought striking for the second consecutive year and renewed fighting in central, northern and northeast region. As a result, the country is affected today by major displacements of population, probably unprecedented since the Soviet invasion. More than 500.000 Afghans have left their home seeking assistance and protection in other regions or neighbouring countries.

In Iran, there is presently, no clear procedure to examine the newcomers needs in term of protection; thus, they can be arrested and deported anytime back to Afghanistan.

They live actually in an increasing distress due not only to their illegal situation and their poor economic means in Iran but also to a lack of perspective of return given the absence of minimum livelihood and the insecurity in their native country.

Afghan refugees in the Iranian society are more and more commonly assimilated to economic migrants and sometimes to criminals. Such a perception occults the reality of events happening nowadays in Afghanistan and the reasons for many of them to flee their country in order to escape persecutions, generalized violence and a potential risk of starvation.

In this regard, the stories that we frequently heard from newcomers in Gulshar reveal the necessity of discerning the reasons pushing them to flee their country. Such understanding is necessary to address the needs in assistance and protection of Afghans, either in their country or in third countries among which is Iran.

**2/ Method of study and results**

The clinic of Gulshar has become a place of reference for many Afghans looking for free medical care. The newcomers are particularly vulnerable after their hazardous journey and are isolated during the first weeks of their arrival. The local community often refers them to the clinic as their precarious situation put them in greater need of medical, social and economic support.

Over a period of more than four and a half months, between 02/09/00 and 17/01/01, 754 families of newcomers were identified either coming spontaneously to the clinic, or met during home visiting activities. They were defined as those who had arrived in Iran less than six months before.

In parallel, Msf team carried out activities of vulnerability assessment and follow up of some of these families, in order to respond to some of their particular needs for preventive health and relief.

A total of 570 families were interviewed. They were all asked similar questions in order to collect comparable information and define general trends on the origin and demography of the families, period of arrival, overall living conditions, reasons for leaving Afghanistan and conditions of travel to Iran.

The result of this study has to be interpreted as an indicator of displacement, status and need of a specific group of population, at a particular time, in a limited geographical area of Mashhad. The results cannot be extrapolated to encompass the situation at the level of Mashhad region, even less all Iran. Moreover, the extremely changing situation in Afghanistan can influence the origin, size and motivation of future groups of newcomers.

The selection of the interviewed families may appear not fully randomised since they were selected according to medical and socio-economic criteria. However, these families are quite representative of the flux of newcomers who transited or stayed in Gulshar area over the past months.

Extracts of their stories have been gathered in annexes to this document to illustrate the different events they went through, from their recent life and events in Afghanistan to their arrival in Iran. On several occasions, these testimonies describe a situation of drought, war and targeted violence. Similar accounts have been observed and reported by different organisations and media working in Afghanistan.

### 3/ General information on newcomers

- **Province of origin in Afghanistan:**

The origin of the sample of 570 families interviewed shows nearly no difference with the total group of families identified as newcomers; except for proportionally fewer families from Herat (5.6%), and proportionally more from Jowzjan, 11.2%, in comparison with the group of 754 families recorded. This shows that the selection took into account that families coming from Herat were relatively less vulnerable, while those coming from Jowzjan were in greater distress, partly due to the violence of the events they encountered and the length of their journey to Iran.

District/ Province	Sept. 00	Oct. 00	Nov. 00	Dec. 00	Jan. 01	Total interviewed	Total recorded
<b>Balkh/Mazar</b>	54 43%	31 39%	29 20%	28 20%	27 34%	169 29.6%	232 30.8%
<b>Bamyan</b>	7 5%	12 15%	18 13%	23 16%	13 16%	73 12.8%	116 15.4%
<b>DareSuf/Samangan</b>	33 26%	17 22%	23 16%	18 13%	28 35%	119 20.8%	139 18.4%
<b>Ghowr</b>	11 9%	13 16%	23 16%	22 15%	3 4%	72 12.6%	83 11%
<b>Herat</b>	10 8%	1 1%	11 8%	9 6%	1 1%	32 5.6%	64 8.5%
<b>Jowzjan</b>	4 3%	1 1%	22 15%	32 22%	5 6%	64 11.2%	45 6%
<b>Kabul</b>	3 2%	0 0%	1 1%	2 1%	1 1%	7 1.2%	11 1.5%
<b>Uruzgan</b>	2 2%	2 2%	5 4%	4 3%	1 1%	14 2.4%	17 2.3%
<b>Other</b>	2 2%	2 2%	10 7%	5 3%	1 1%	20 3.5%	47 6.2%
<b>Total</b>	126 ⇒ 22.1%	79 13.8%	142 24.9%	143 25%	80 14%	570 100%	754 100%

Half of the families we saw come from a geographical area extending from Mazar I Sharif city and surrounding villages, southwards in the province of Balkh (mostly Sharkent, Sholgara, Deh Dadi and Keshendeh districts), and the district of Dar e Suf in Samangan province.

Families from Ghowr had come mainly from the eastern and remotest district of Lal e Sarjantal.

Families from Bamyan had come mostly from Bamyan, Yakawlang and Panjâb districts.

Starting from November 2000, an influx of families from Jowzjan was observed essentially coming from the districts of Sangcharak and Balkhâb.

• **Period of arrival in Iran :**

All the families had arrived in Iran less than six months before being met, 90 % of them less than three months and 52% of them less than one month before.

Most of the newcomer families from Mazar i Sharif have arrived earlier during the summer 2000. In September and early October, 40% of the families met were arriving from the city and neighbouring villages of Mazar I Sharif. This flux diminished over the following months.

Those from other districts of Balkh province or Bamyan, started to arrive later starting from September, and those from Jowzjan and Ghowr starting from October until December.

Families from Dar e Suf had been arriving regularly since the summer.

• **Ethnic Origin and religion :**

77% of the families were Hazara. 20 % were Seyed (descendant from the family of the Prophet Mohamed) and as such represent a group with an important social and religious status in the Shiite Hazara community. The Seyed families were in majority from DareSuf, Bamyan and the southern districts of Balkh and Jowzjan.

Others were 9 Tajik families and 1 Pashtun family, all from Herat province.

Nearly all the families were Shiite Muslims. New refugees of Sunni confession were rarely seen, as they stay more in southern parts of Khorassan, in Seistan-Baluchistan and other southern provinces, which have a larger Iranian Sunni population.

• **Demography for 570 families of newcomers:**

Demography	Under 5 y.o		5-14 y.o		14-60 y.o		Over 60 y.o		Total	
Male	275	50.3%	525	54.6%	580	45.6%	78	60.5%	1458	50.2%
Female	271	49.6%	436	45.4%	690	54.3%	51	39.5%	1448	49.8%
<b>Total</b>	546	18.8%	961	33%	1270	43.7%	129	4.4%	2906	100%

For different age groups, we can observe a difference in sex ratio:

In the age group “over 60 years old”, males represent 60%, while females are only 40%. While no clear explanation can be given, the families often told us that in fighting areas, elders and community leaders of some villages have been more targeted by the Taleban, as they represented a local authority. On another hand, the difficulty of the journey to Iran is such that some families decided to split and leave behind them those who could not physically make the trip.

In the age group “15-60 years old”, females are over-represented compared to males. The difference appears essentially in the 169 families coming from Balkh province and Mazar i Sharif, with 161 males and 239 females in this age group. There can be various explanations for this considering that following the occupation of the province by the Taleban and the massacres of Mazar i Sharif in 1998, many men were murdered or arrested, or joined opposition groups in mountain areas. Families described that arrests of men are still frequent in Taleban controlled areas.

From September to January, 18% of all new families seen had no male as head of family: particularly families from Dar e Suf and Mazar in September and later those from Jowzjân. 28% of the families coming from the province of Jowzjan during that period had no male head of the family.

The reasons are various, but the most commonly cited are the death or the arrest of the head of family. In a few cases, women admitted that their husband and relatives were still fighting inside Afghanistan.

In the age group, “5-14 years old”, males are over-represented compared to females. This is particularly the case in families coming from Balkh (except Mazar i Sharif) and Ghowr. For 72 families from Ghowr, they had 74 boys and only 46 girls from this age class.

While the following may not be a sufficient explanation in itself, several families told us that due to a desperate need of income, they chose to marry their daughter to a lower age (starting from the puberty) that they would have done usually (between 15 and 17 years old). They mentioned also that due to the poor economic situation, they received a very low sum as the bride price.

#### **4/ Living conditions**

- Two thirds of the families visited had settled in Gulshar, the rest being accommodated in surrounding townships, some of which MSF visits regularly with mobile clinics.

Families usually rent a room in a house already occupied by other Afghan refugees. All the houses have latrines and tap water. Most of them have city gas.

Average living space per person is estimated at 2.8 m<sup>2</sup> for all these families. Often several families live in the same room, especially during the first weeks of their arrival. 27% of the families have to share a room with other persons or families, having then an average life space reduced at 2 m<sup>2</sup>/person.

28% of the families were lodged either by relatives, who themselves had settled in Gulshar years ago, or even sometimes by some other newcomer families.

25% of the families did not pay rent either because they lived with relatives, or their rent was paid by charities. In this last case, they were mostly families without male support. For those who have to pay rent, the average cost is 90.000 Iranian Rials (11 US \$) per month.

In several cases, families having no initial contact with the local community had to sleep outside in Gulshar for some days before getting accommodation and support.

Nearly all the families were in debt, ranging from 120.000 IRR (15 US \$) to 13 millions IRR. The average per family was of 3.5 millions IRR (434 US \$). It is mostly due to the payment of smugglers hired to enter into Iran, then to the accumulation of loans to cover daily living expenses, e.g. when they arrive in Gulshar, they have usually spent all their savings on the journey. In order to pay off some of their debts to their main creditor, families usually get a loan from relatives or rich Afghans in the community, usually natives from their own region.

The average debt does not vary significantly between those who arrived between 3 and 6 months ago. This illustrates their difficulty to get a job with significant income in Iran to reimburse their debt.

Of the 570 families, a quarter of them had no revenue at all. Those with a source of income had an average monthly income per family of 192.000 IRR (24 US \$) per month in September. In December 2000, it was only 133.000 IRR (16.5 US \$) per family per month.

In a quarter of the families with a source of income, children under 14 years old were also working.

The most common jobs are seasonal: shelling of pistachios, extracting saffron from the flowers, brick factories, agriculture... Others have work cleaning wool, waving carpets at home or street selling. In winter, there are usually less job opportunities and mostly young and strong men find temporary work for construction or in workshops.

Women and children often work at home shelling pistachios for 700 IRR per kg (0.09 US \$). One good worker can shell up to 4 kg/day. Young boys can work weaving carpets for 1000 to 2000 IRR/day.

It is more difficult for the most recent newcomers to find a job, as they don't have established relations in the community and fear more to be arrested following the increasing enforcement of labour restrictions for foreigners.

70% of those who arrived a month ago had still no revenue, and as such don't have the profile of an experienced seasonal migrant.

It is clear that there is a sense of solidarity inside the community. At least 43% of the families receive help from relatives, 14% from neighbours and 14% from charity organisations.

Some of them receive donations in cash or in kind (cloth, food, services...), although not enough to provide decent living conditions.

The presence of relatives in the Afghan community of Mashhad is often a reason for newcomers to reach particularly this city. For other families, the presence of the Holy Shrine of the Imam Reza is often cited as a justification to settle in Mashhad.

Of the 570 families, 14% reported the death of a close family member (parents, children, brothers or sisters) during a one-year period preceding their arrival. 96 people had died out of a total population of 3002 persons, giving a considerable average mortality rate of 0.88 deaths/10000/day.

Among the families seen in September, half of the deaths were related to the war situation (bombing, violence, mines...).

## 5/ Reasons for coming to Iran

The families were asked how they took the decision to leave Afghanistan, with a particular attention to understand different elements including their status in the Afghan society and in their community, the economic and security context they were facing, and any major event which recently disrupted their life and may have provoked their decision to leave their country.

6 categories of reasons have been defined according to particular criteria of inclusion and exclusion (see following paragraphs). The definition and boundary of each category proved in several cases to be restrictive. A considerable number of families have several interdependent reasons for leaving their place of residence and coming to Iran. Their decision was often a result of successive constraints and events added one to each other (Insecurity, harassment by warring parties, violence plus vulnerability linked to the drought).

The interviewer tried to dissociate the various reasons and to determine the main factors and events in order to retain one priority reason and a secondary one. 128 families out of 417 expressed at least two reasons for coming to Iran.

In case of doubt or of lack of elements of judgment, reasons for fleeing to Iran were classified in the less specific category as “fear of persecution” or “victim of war” by opposition to victim of persecution or as “economic” by opposition to drought. For example, a clear distinction between a person in fear of persecution and a victim of persecution would need, of course, a deeper interview, which was out of the frame and the objective of our study.

Main reason for coming to Iran :	Victims of persecution	Fear of persecution	Victims of war	Drought	Economic reasons	Other reasons	Total
<b>Balkh/Mazar</b>	14 14% ⇒	57 57%	8 8%	11 11%	8 8%	1 1%	99 24%
<b>Bamyan</b>	6 10%	17 27%	4 6%	26 42%	5 8%	4 7%	62 15%
<b>DareSuf/Samangan</b>	28 32%	28 33%	14 16%	12 14%	0 0%	3 5%	85 20%
<b>Ghowr</b>	2 3%	11 19%	0 0%	33 59%	7 12%	4 7%	57 14%
<b>Herat</b>	0 0%	11 50%	0 0%	0 0%	8 36%	3 5%	22 5%
<b>Jowzjan</b>	13 22%	22 37%	21 36%	0 0%	2 3%	1 2%	59 14%
<b>Kabul</b>	0 0%	3 75%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	1 2%	4 1%
<b>Uruzgan</b>	0 0%	6 50%	0 0%	2 16%	0 0%	4 7%	12 3%
<b>Other</b>	7 41%	7 35%	0 0%	3 17%	0 0%	0 0%	17 4%
<b>Total</b>	70 ⇒ 17%	162 39%	47 11%	87 21%	30 7%	21 5%	417 100%

### \*Victims of persecution

The following definition has been used as a reference for classification of the cases:

Threat for the life or the freedom of a person or of a group for reasons connected to their race, religion, nationality, political opinion or for having relation with a particular social group or a political or military group as well as some serious violations of human rights for the same reason (beating, forced deprivation of livelihood...). The difference with the case considered as ‘fear of persecution’ was estimated through the deliberate and systematic character of the harassment, the degree of violence and the immediate consequence for the health and livelihood of the victims.

Out of 417 families, 70 were considered as victims of persecution (17%). None of them had secondary reason to come to Iran.

Among these 70 families, 28 were from Dar e Suf/Samangan, 14 from Balkh, 13 from Jowzjan, 6 from Bamyan. Only 4 were from Mazar and 2 from Ghowr.

Very often the villages of these victims were located in a fighting area and had been occupied by Northern Alliance fighters before attacks and conquest by the Taleban.

40 families had had their houses burned, either during the bombing of their village or as a deliberate act of destruction of the village. In the latter case, the village was looted and massive killing of civilians took place. Families reported large-scale burning of houses in the following villages: Sang e Takht, Bazar e Soukhte, Nawamad, Sârkhjoy in Dar e Suf district, Khamkalak in Yakawlang district, Abkhor, Abekalan, Dushkhar (near Balkhâb) in Sangcharak district, Kharganatu, Seyadabad in Bamyan district.

Several cases of persecution on the ground of religious difference were reported. Shiite clerics were arrested, beaten or killed. Some individuals were beaten and forced to pray according to the Sunni ritual. Shiite mosques have been burned. In Abkhor, Jowzjan province, last spring, a massive killing was perpetrated by Taleban forces in a mosque while people were gathered for prayer.

In fighting areas, villages have been falling successively into the hands of the Northern Alliance and then of the Taleban. The head of the village was often suspected by both sides of helping and favouring their opponents. As such they were harassed or persecuted.

Families suffered more systematically violence from the Taleban. They had to face the deliberate killing of one or several family members, the looting or destruction of their house and belongings.

Some families were suspected of links with fighters or opposition parties and were consequently harassed. The Taleban arrested male members of the family, meanwhile they could also beat or kill other relatives. In jail they were often brutally interrogated, beaten or tortured. Some died, became disabled or are still missing.

We saw some cases of families who lost, during an attack, 4 or 5 close relatives and their house. Then, these families, after several months hiding in the mountains, decided to flee to Iran.

### **\*Fear of persecution**

This category was considered for those who had serious reasons to fear from abuses or a threat on freedom and life for themselves or for their close family members, as a result of their ethnic, religious or social origin, or a relation with a political or military group.

Some have also been victims of minor and occasional violence or of temporary arrest, which induced a fear of further and more serious harassment, but for these few families it could not always be established that they were victims of acts, actually putting in danger their life and livelihood.

The context of brief interviews in which the study was implemented did not always give us enough time to go into the families' circumstances in sufficient detail. This sometimes made it difficult to decide whether to qualify their reasons as 'victims of persecution' or 'fear of persecution' and also if such fear was fully legitimate or not. When it was not clear they were classified as 'fear of persecution' as they expressed in priority a concern for protection.

161 families in this category, 39% of 417, expressed 'fear of persecution' as their main reason for coming to Iran. They were mostly from Mazar, Balkh, Dar e Suf and Jowzjan.

If we cumulate both categories ("victim of persecution" and "fear of persecution"), we observe that they include 232 families out of 417 (56% of the total families). 71% of the families from Balkh, 65% from DareSuf, 59% from Jowzjan and only 22% from Ghowr were in one of both categories.

The cases seen often declared having a relative who was a fighter or were former fighters themselves. The relatives of fighters have not necessarily been engaged in the fights themselves but had often been harassed by the Taleban after denunciation by a neighbour and suspicion of supporting the opposition.

Among the former fighters some declared to be linked with opposition parties but several declared to be peasants, who became occasionally fighters to defend their village.

They risked arrest by the Taleban, who they believe, maintain a wide network of informers in the community. Opposition groups also harassed some families as they refused to join them or pay a tax. Taxes were often raised in kind on the livestock, which more and more families could not afford because of the drought.

People coming from Mazar I Sharif, described the segregation of which they were victims, with the frequent restriction of jobs for Hazaras, the obligation for Hazara shopkeepers to open their shops only for a restricted number of days per week..

The families described how the Taleban forces visited them regularly searching for weapons, or information on the fighters: intimidation, interrogation sometimes with physical violence, verbal threats, collection of arbitrary taxes or looting happened frequently during these visits.

The problem of forced military enlistment is also of very frequent concern. Many families described an upsurge last year in the forced enlistment campaign by the Taleban amongst the Hazara community. Men and youngsters starting from fourteen years old are targeted. Usually, the Hazara men are sent in first position on the front-line. Furthermore, the situation could become unbearable for them as they were sent to fight against opposition fighters who could be from the same ethnic group and region as themselves.

In order to escape forced enlistment, they stayed hidden in their house or in a remote mountain area for weeks and months until they finally decided to flee to another country with their family.

Some conscripts managed to escape from the Taleban army and they immediately fled to another country as well.

Those who had already lost an adult male decided to leave abroad to avoid the forced enlistment of their adolescents, and consequently the loss of additional family support.

Peasants who lived in a fighting area, like Dar e Suf, Balkhob, Sangcharak, Bamyan, feared being considered de facto as fighters by the Taleban, and to be arrested and/or forcibly enlisted. When travelling through another region of Afghanistan, even in Herat, they told no one where they came from. During their stay in Herat, families did not feel secure and used to hide themselves in surrounding villages.

Men, who had been released from jail, fearing new arrest, usually gathered their family and fled to another country. Several people showed signs of post traumatic syndrome associated with depression following mistreatment. Some individuals had been imprisoned just because they were Hazara and Shiite and they had stayed at least one year in jail, without trial or conviction.

Some families from Abkhor decided to come to Iran to protect their daughters, following abductions of women, which they said the Taleban perpetrated in the area.

Only one quarter of the 161 families in “fear of persecution” gave a secondary reason to come to Iran, mostly being the drought situation.

#### **\*Victims of the war situation**

In this category were considered families who had to come to Iran because they had lost members or their belongings and livelihoods in a war situation, who were displaced because of living close to a front-line, who were wounded or victims of a mine explosion.

Families of fighters who had been wounded during a military action were also considered as “victims of the war situation”.

For some cases, it was difficult to classify them as victims of war and exclude a background of persecution: some villages seem to have been targeted because they were either strongholds of the Northern Alliance parties or because they resisted the Taleban. They fell after heavy bombing causing destruction, houses burned and deaths: part of the population ran away into the mountains. It could not be ascertained whether individual families were directly targeted themselves and it seems that both warring parties had positions in and around the village.

47 families (11%) out of the 417 have been classified in this category. They were mostly from Jowzjân and Dar e Suf.

The drought was often an additional reason for those who lost their home, livestock and family support during the war events.

If we cumulate this category (“victims of war”) to the two others previously described (“victims of persecution” and “fear of persecution”), it appears that two thirds of the families interviewed came to Iran because they faced violence and insecurity.



### **\*Drought.**

This group includes the families who were directly affected by the drought, mostly because they lost their livestock. They were farmers or unemployed workers who used to rely on seasonal jobs in agriculture.

21% of the 417 families mentioned the drought situation as their main reason for coming.

58% of the families from Ghowr cited it directly as their principal reason. They were coming essentially from the district of Lal e Sarjangal.

74 % of the families from Ghowr, 52 % of those from Bamyan and 37% of those from Dar e Suf cited the effects of drought in Afghanistan as one of their motives (main or secondary reason) for coming to Iran.

The effects of the drought, either as the main or a secondary reason has been on constant increase over the past months particularly since November.

In fact, before winter, families left for Iran in a more preventive attitude, while for those who arrived more recently in winter, the pressure caused by the lack of food was obviously the main reason for leaving their country.

15 % of the families gave drought as an additional reason for going to Iran. Among these families, the main concerns were related to fear of persecution, being harassed, mostly by the Taleban fighters and sometimes also by the opposition groups. People living in Dar e Suf (Samangan province), Sangcharak, Balkhob (Jowzjan province), Bamyan suffered from the collection of heavy taxes in kind on their livestock from both Talebans and opposition groups, and from the destruction of their home or village.

They had to flee to another village, adding a burden for local families who sheltered them. Often they had to flee hastily to the mountains to escape an attack, living sometimes several months in a cave or a hut, eating wild plants or begging for food from village to village, until they could no longer bear the living conditions aggravated by the effects of the drought. They finally decided to flee to other countries in order to survive, being moreover afraid that if they settled in another province, the Taleban would discover that they came from opposition areas.

### **\* Economic reasons**

This was the main reason for some particularly vulnerable socio-economic groups like old persons, widows, disabled heads of family, or simply families looking for a minimum income.

The families who were affected directly by the drought (farmers...) were not included in this category (see previous §). Of course, the effects of the drought have a stronger impact on the vulnerable categories of population, and many families seen as leaving for "economic" reasons were also affected by the drought to various degrees. The loss of purchasing capacity of many peasants has induced a general decrease of monetary exchanges affecting directly the economy of shopkeepers.

Only 7% of the families interviewed came to Iran due to economic problems as their main reason. Families from Herat and Ghowr province were more represented in this group. Among those from Herat, ethnic Tajik were more represented.

Such cases included widows or women without family support, who cannot work and feed their family, because the head of family or a close relative supporting the family has recently been arrested, imprisoned, forcibly enlisted or killed while fighting. In most cases, the Taleban authorities gave no information about their missing relatives. Many women without support of a male relative had no other issue than to sell progressively all their belongings in order to survive.

6% of the people cited economic problems as an additional but secondary reason to some situations or events (violence, health...) that caused the families to flee from Afghanistan.

### **\*Other reasons**

Of the 21 families who gave other reasons, 9 of them were either families who had decided to join close relatives already living in Iran, or for the possibility to studies for themselves or for their children or coming to visit a sick relative.

The 12 remaining cases came especially to Iran for health reasons, mostly to get proper medical treatment, which is not available in their country.

At least 3 cases of food intoxication were reported, caused by a wild plant growing among the wheat and known in Afghanistan as "Chalmak". An epidemic was identified in spring 1999 in the province of Herat and caused the death of at least 150 persons.

The MSF clinic cared for two families who entered in this category, but unfortunately there exists no treatment for their case.

Health problems were also a secondary reason for coming to Iran for 8 refugees considered initially as victims of war or persecution: Some had been wounded or burned during a bombing, injured by a mine, severely beaten or tortured and they still have major side effects due to their wounds. These people were either afraid to stay in Afghanistan or could not find proper treatment in their country.

## **6/ The journey to Iran**

Most of the families undertook a hazardous and long journey to leave Afghanistan. For those who could prepare their trip, it took them weeks to sell their belongings and gather the money for the trip. For others who have been victims of an attack on their village, they often had to leave hastily their dwelling, being unable to take their belongings with them. Some of them had been internally displaced for weeks and months in remote mountainous areas, eating wild food or begging for food and shelter from one village to another.

They often had to walk for several days during the first part of their trip, in order to reach the main roads and get transport. They also had to cross high and snowy passes of Hazarajat.

They were travelling with women and children, often in bad condition. Some died from disease before reaching Iran. Several women gave birth on the way. There were several moderately malnourished children seen, although not in alarming proportions. Very few severely malnourished children were seen. Since December, there have been regularly cases of measles detected among the children of these families, who did not receive immunisation in their country.

Their trip lasted on average more than three weeks, from their departure up to Mashhad. Families from Herat made the trip to Iran in 4 days, those from Dar e Suf and from Jowzjan had the longest trip arriving in Iran one month after their departure.

The families from central regions, Bamyan province, Lal e Sarjangal (Ghowr), Balkhâb (Jowzjan), Bazar e Soukhte (Dar e Suf) travelled through Ghazni and Kandahar, then to Herat or directly to the border through Farah and Nimroz province.

Families from the Northern provinces, Mazar, Charkent, Dallan, Sholgara (Balkh province), Sangcharak took the northern road from Mazar to Herat.

Those who had come from war areas like Dar e Suf or Jowzjan, or those having former fighters in their groups, travelled more cautiously, avoiding cities or main roads, walking for days and nights.

Many families passed through Herat, where they stayed for a few days, often just enough time to find a contact to cross the border. Most of them did not feel secure in Herat and preferred to stay hidden in the local Hazara community or in isolated areas out of the city (brick factories...).

A few families tried to get access to relief assistance in Herat and believe that they were put on a waiting list or rejected because of their ethnicity. They avoided mentioning their district of origin, being often a war area, for fear of being considered as fighters and arrested.

It is not clear whether the access to humanitarian assistance is systematically impeded for Hazara in Herat. However, it has to be underlined that this group is particularly underrepresented in Herat's IDP camps.

Several cases reported that they had been harassed or arrested in Herat. The local Hazara community is particularly targeted each time there is a security incident in the region.

The violence and common segregation faced by these families coming from the central region push them finally to cross the border join their own refugee community abroad.

The main area for crossing the border is the region of Zaranj in the province of Nimruz, from where families try to reach Zabol in Iran, although several groups of families have been passing also through Pakistan and then entering into Iran to reach Zahedan.

Nearly all the families had to cross the border with a smuggler. There is clearly a very active network of human trafficking on both sides of the border. Smugglers were sometimes contacted as far as Ghazni. They accompanied the family on the way, facilitating check post crossing and sometimes passing them to another guide after a certain distance. When the family had no money the debt was sold to another guide with added value.

In some cases, the family went alone up to the border region, but when it comes to crossing the border, they were always accompanied by a smuggler.

Once they crossed, they could have to stay hidden for several days in houses inside or near Zabul. In these buildings, they were gathered with other groups of newcomers, waiting several days to be transported either in trucks or buses towards the main cities in Iran (Mashhad, Tehran, Qom...)

Families could be separated in different vehicles. There were numerous cases that had been arrested on the way by Iranian police, and deported back to Afghanistan. They were separated from the rest of their family and tried crossing the border again to reach Mashhad. Some had crossed the border two or three times, accumulating ever larger debts when they arrive in Iran.

Nearly all the families were asked a large sum of money by the smugglers. The average sum asked per person was over 800.000 IRR (100 US \$), but it appears to have gone up since September. Some had to pay the equivalent of 200 US \$ per person. Several large families were demanded a sum up to 10 million IRR (1250 US \$).

In order to pay, families gave the few things that they still possessed and as most of them could not pay the full price, the smuggler kept one or several persons, sometimes women and children, as a guarantee of future payment. One third of the families were in this case.

The hostages were released once the family could find part or the whole sum demanded. Usually the money was collected from some relatives installed in Iran or from members of the Afghan community of Mashhad. Many hostages were released after a few weeks, during which they were kept isolated in a house or sometimes put to work.

None of the families met did ask for asylum at their arrival on the territory of Iran. In each case, a smuggler escorted them up to Mashhad. Also many of them had no knowledge of possibly existing asylum procedure at the border and feared to be arrested and sent back to their country.

However, once they arrived in Mashhad, 75 families out of 417 have decided to apply for temporary asylum in the frame of the screening program implemented by the Iranian authorities and the Unhcr during the year 2000.

On these 75 demands for asylum, 16 were accepted (13 considered either as "victims of persecution", "in fear of persecution" or "war victims" according to our study). 7 cases were rejected and the others were still considered as pending cases when the asylum program was interrupted in December 2000.

## **8/ Conclusion**

As the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan deteriorates, new refugees arrive everyday in Iran. The drought has become increasingly a factor of movement of populations in Afghanistan, but for a large number of refugees, motivations remain primarily a major concern for protection. Generalized violence, harassment and persecution against some large groups of population, particularly the Hazara Shiites community, are more and more common.

Many of them, who fled hastily their country and were heavily ransomed while trying to cross the border, are left without minimal conditions of livelihood and without any legal status in Iran.

The emergency character of the situation prevailing for Afghan populations emphasizes the need for reinforced means of assistance, asylum and protection of new refugees in Iran.

Only the Iranian Authorities can grant refugee status under the 1951 Refugee Convention. If some of these refugees will meet the requirements to be qualified as such (and therefore to receive the statutory guarantees established by the Convention), many others may not meet the requirements because they are fleeing, not only individual persecutions but general insecurity, war and drought.

Anyhow, for these « non-statutory refugees », there are minimum standards of treatment that the Islamic Republic of Iran should implement (see below), with the good offices of UNHCR, and a strong support from international donors and relief organizations.

UNHCR's Executive Committee has set forth the minimum rights that must be granted by all states, until a durable solution can be found, to refugees who do not come under the definition of the 1951 Refugee Convention and

therefore cannot benefit from the status it provides. In the current context of massive influx of refugees from Afghanistan to neighbouring countries like Iran and Pakistan, the minimum rights for Afghan refugees must be granted. It will not be possible without a clear mobilization of the international community.

**Protection of asylum seekers in situation of large-scale influx**  
**Conclusion no.22 (session XXXII) of April 24, 1981**  
**Adopted by the UNHCR Executive Committee on International Protection of Refugees.**

Individual who cannot benefit from formal refugee status nonetheless must be treated in conformity with certain minimum standards of protection:

⇒ The right to flee persecution does not automatically entail the right to receive asylum. In case of mass exodus of people, states priority must be to provide at least temporary refuge for them.

⇒ States should not expel or return such people towards a territory where they risk persecution.

⇒ Until durable solutions are found, states must respect the following minimum rights:

- no penal sanctions because of illegal entry or presence in a state;
- respect for their fundamental rights and guarantees; material assistance (food, shelter, medical assistance...);
- prohibition of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment;
- no discrimination on the grounds of race, religion, political opinion, nationality, country of origin and physical incapacity;
- access to courts and other due process rights;
- the settlements must be located in a safe area, in other words it must not be too near the border of the country of origin;
- respect of family unity;
- assistance in searching for family members;
- protection of minors and unaccompanied children;
- possibility of sending and receiving correspondence;
- registration of any births, deaths, or marriages;
- permission to transfer assets;
- favourable conditions for voluntary repatriation;
- obligation of states of search for a durable solution.

## 9/ Annex

### Victims of persecution

09/09/00

Two singles, Hazara, Shiites, living in **Herat**. They said that whenever there was some security incident in Herat, or elsewhere, the Taleban immediately go to Shiite Muslims' houses and arrest the men. Their father was in jail for 4 months, and their uncle for 7 months. The latter was so badly treated that he died after his release. They say that if a Shiite merchant in the bazaar is rich, the Taleban accuse him of spying for Iran. If one possesses a picture from Iran or the portrait of the Imam Khomeyni, one can be arrested.

They added that Sunni Muslims don't get harassed so much by the Taleban.

13/09/00

A family from the village of **Sang e Takht, district of Dekundi, province of Oruzgan**.

Less than 6 months ago, the Taleban entered their village and searched the houses. In their home, the Taleban found a "Mohr" (stone used by Shiites during prayer). Then, the Taleban forced him to stand for 5 hours in a cold mountain stream. Afterwards, the man fell ill. But he was forced to go fighting in the neighbouring province of Ghowr. As he was not willing to fight and was sick, he escaped but then was caught back by Taleban.

They forced him to stand in the cold stream again. After such abuses, he became seriously ill and decided to go to Kabul for treatment. He has kidney problems and his legs are swollen with oedema: he cannot walk properly or work as a farmer. He had different medical examinations but no proper treatment. He stayed there for two months.

When he came back to his village he saw that all the houses except his house, had been burned, and the inhabitants had left for Iran or Pakistan. His family was waiting for him but the Taleban had taken their cattle and they had started to redistribute the lands of the village to some Kushi families (Pashtun nomads).

Since they had less and less resources and the Taleban harassed them, the family decided to leave the area to go to Iran.

31/10/00

A family coming from **Dehshour, a village near Mazar, Balkh province**. The head of family was a farmer working for a landowner. Two years ago, a commander from the Wahdat party arrived in the village to enlist some Hazara men by force. He initially refused, but he was beaten and was finally forced to go fighting. Two months later, when the Taleban invaded the area, he stopped fighting. Later on, a neighbour informed the Taleban that he had been a fighter. They came to his house and arrested him. He managed to escape and took refuge in Dallan where his wife and their three children came to join him. They decided to settle there and he started to farm again.

One day, somebody informed the Taleban again that he had been a fighter. They came to his house three or four times. Each time he was able to escape or hide himself, but the last time, they arrested him. In jail, he was beaten and they forced him to stand in a cold stream of water. His wife paid the Taleban 100 000 Afghani and obtained his release. However they told him that he was enlisted for fighting. This idea was unbearable for him; he couldn't imagine being a fighter again and even less against his own people. Ten days later, the family decided to flee to Iran where they arrived one month ago.

16/12/00

This family has been living in Iran for 18 years. Last year, the head of family was at work when some policemen came to arrest him. He had a blue card but they took it and destroyed it, then they gave him a letter to leave the country. Ten days later, the police came to his house and arrested him leaving his wife and his children alone.

At the same period, in Herat, the Taleban heard that some Hazara were preparing an attack so they launched massive arrests in the Hazara community of Herat who lives mainly in a district called Djibrail.

This man, along with three hundred other Hazara men, was deported to Afghanistan the day after these arrests. When these deportees arrived in Herat, the Taleban were waiting for them and they were all arrested and sent to jail.

The head of this family stayed one year in jail and once released, he came back to Iran to join his family. He arrived in Mashhad last spring, the whole family applied for asylum and they were accepted.

23/12/00

A family coming from **Abkhor, Jowzjan province**. Three opposition parties had settled in this area and the inhabitants were obliged to provide food, help and fighters to them.

Since the beginning of the year the Taleban had launched land and air attacks and everybody was enlisted to fight against them. Finally at Norouz the Taleban seized this village. They set fire to the houses that had not been damaged by bombing. They killed many people who were gathered at the mosque and then they burnt it.

This woman lost her two brothers in the mosque, while one of her sons, 17 years old, a fighter, was arrested and killed. This family and others inhabitants of the village escaped to the mountains. The Taleban settled a camp with tents in the village and spread the rumour that the inhabitants were helped by Iran. So they had to leave the country and leave the land for the Pashtouns.

23/12/00

One family, Hazara, Shiite, composed of one couple and 3 children. They used to live in **Balkhâb, Jowzjan province**. The head of this family was a fighter with the Wahdat party.

A Hazara commander allied with two other commanders obliged the inhabitants of this area to provide them with food, money and guns. He started to put a lot of pressure on the population and the two other commanders disagreed with his attitude and separated. Then he made an alliance with the Taleban and asked the population to follow him: they all refused and the fighting started.

The Taleban finally succeeded in entering into Balkhâb and they harassed the inhabitants for seven days, took their cattle, they entered the Shiite mosques, looted them and set fire to the mollah's pulpit.

Then the Taleban fighters would have abducted 35 women who, since then, have never been seen again.

With the support of this Hazara commander, they enlisted around 300 men by force. Some were sent to fight and some others displaced between Balkhob and Yakowlang, and forced to build a road. Once mobilised, the Hazara fighters were sent by the Taleban on the first position of the front-line. Seven days later, the Northern Alliance seized back Balkhâb from the Taleban. Taleban airplanes started to launch daily attacks on these places, launching bombs and rockets, targeting the villages and mostly Balkhob.

In one night, 100 people were killed by the bombing. The inhabitants fled to the mountains. Then a group of eighty persons decided to flee to Iran. Among them were this family and men escaping forced enlistment. They went through Bamyan, Kabul, Ghazni and Kandahar. In Zabol, the smugglers kept fourteen hostages.

23/01/01

Three families, Hazara, Shiites, composed of 11 members. They used to live in **Kham Kalak** (one day walk from Yakawlang city), near another village Flaty, **Yakawlang district, Bamyan province**.

This village was in an area controlled by the Wahdat party. Five months ago, the Taleban seized the village. For three months, they harassed the population. Living conditions became unbearable: houses looted, people molested or arrested, people arbitrary killed. For example if anyone was caught trying to escape from the village, he would be immediately killed.

One day the Taleban came to visit and threaten these families, accusing them of helping the Northern Alliance. They pushed one of the head of the family hard and he fell against the heater and was burned. Another one was beaten with a gun and stayed unconscious for three hours.

Then after three months, the Northern Alliance seized back this village. Again, two months later the Taleban recaptured the village. Many inhabitants fled to the mountainous and remote areas. Some others, particularly the old people were so confused that they preferred to stay in the village.

When they entered the village, the Taleban set fire to most of the houses with kerosene and killed the remaining inhabitants that they could find. They burned the Hosseinie (meeting place for Shiite prayer), the mosques. When the family came back from the mountain, they saw their village destroyed, dead people in the street. Their houses had been burned, all their belongings were lost, they were left with only what they were wearing. They decided to flee to Iran. They believe that very few families stayed in the village.

### **Insecurity and fear of persecution:**

16/10/00

One family, Hazara, Shiite, composed of one woman and her mother, both are widows, her brother and her niece. They lived near **Mazar**. Two years ago, at the fall of Mazar, her husband fled to Dar e Suf to keep on fighting but one year later he was killed.

Her mother and herself farmed and could survive selling their harvest. Last year the Taleban knew her husband was a commander so they came to their farm and took all their crops. Then they could open a little shop in the bazaar. One day the Taleban came, telling them it was forbidden to sell cigarettes. They closed the shop and took away all her belongings. After that, they went to their house and told her that since her husband had been a fighter, her family will always be disturbed by them. Then they imprisoned her brother, 19 years old. In jail he was beaten with electric wires. They asked for guns in exchange for his release. Seven days later his mother and uncle brought the Taleban three guns and he was freed. After that, he stayed hidden in the house and the Taleban came again and again always looking for him.

Her neighbour has two daughters. The Taleban came many times asking him to give them his daughters. One day they threatened him: he must offer them his daughters otherwise he will be killed. He told them to come three days later and he fled with all his family to Iran.

Four months ago, she also decided to flee to Iran with her family.

29/11/00

One couple and four children, Hazara, Shiites. They have been living in Iran for fifteen years. Six years ago, their asylum card was destroyed by a Bafia officer and they were deported to Afghanistan. They settled in Djibrail in a Hazara community near Herat. The first time the Taleban entered Mazar they were defeated by the Hazara resistance. The Taleban of Herat came to Djibrail and he was arrested like a lot of Hazara men, even if they were not fighters. One month later, he was released.

When the Taleban finally succeeded in seizing Mazar, they came back again to this area of **Herat** and he was again arrested. One month later, with 137 other men, he was sent to jail to Kandahar. He was not a fighter and not linked to any fighter.

Most of the people in this jail were Hazara. At the beginning they were all beaten. The fighters were put in a different area of the jail and some were tortured. Many of them died. The Taleban starved the prisoners: 2 breads per day, 2 potatoes and a glass of rice per week. They only went out for the toilets.

He himself was finally released in August, after one and a half years in jail. He immediately fled to Iran fearing arrest again and met his wife and his four children, who had arrived in Gulshar one year ago.

04/12/00

One family, Hazara, Shiite, composed of one couple, one grand mother and 7 children. They used to live in **Sholgara, Balkh province**. Two years ago, when the Taleban seized their village: their house, along with others, was burned. The Taleban took among the inhabitants, twenty-five men, old and young, killed them and burnt their bodies. For Shiite Muslims, this was considered as a sacrilege. During the month of Moharam, at the celebration of the martyrdom of the Imam Hossein, the Taleban entered a Shiite mosque and were singing and dancing in order to disturb the prayer. Then they forced the Shiite Muslims to go to the Sunni mosque and to perform their prayers according to the Sunni tradition. Then they moved some Hazara families out of their houses to replace them with Taleban families.

Last year, the Taleban stepped up the forced enlistment of the Hazara community in his village. They used to send two or three Hazara men, informers, to all the Hazara houses and they ordered the male members to go to fight with the Taleban, or else to give money, 400.000 or 500.000 Afghanis. The young men tried to stay hidden most of the time. This head of family didn't pay the requested money and first he was forced to work for the Taleban, carrying wood.

Due to the heavy fighting in Dar e Suf, the Taleban decided to enlist still more people. The head of this family fled to the mountains with his family and other people. They lived in a remote mountain area and found shelter in a cave for four months during the winter. Then they built a hut for the summer. They were eating plants and wild food. Sometimes, their relatives or some fighters brought them food. Then, twenty-two Hazara men joined them in the mountains. They had been forcibly enlisted to fight in Dar e Suf and had managed to escape. If, during the fighting, some tried to retreat from the front-line, the Taleban could kill them.

After ten months in the mountains, they couldn't bear the living conditions aggravated by the effects of the drought anymore. They decided to flee with his sister, her husband and their 7 children to Iran.

30/01/01

One family, Hazara, Shiite, composed of one couple and 8 children. They used to live in **Mindiak (near Yakawlang city and Nayak village), Yakawlang district, Bamyan province**. There is no road access to this remote village in the mountains.

Since the Taleban invaded Mindiak, they collected one tenth of their livestock (crops, cattle...) every six months. If they couldn't pay this tax, they were sent to jail.

The head of this family possessed a piece of land, sheep and cows. However, because of the drought, he had to sell his cattle in order to buy wheat. Then when the Taleban asked for a cow as tax, he could not provide it and he was imprisoned. There, he was beaten with electric wires and toughly interrogated. They asked him whom he gave his money to, as they suspected him of being linked to the Wahdat party. They also wanted guns. One month later he was released.

Due to the drought, the wheat harvest was one tenth what it had been the previous year. The Taleban didn't permit anyone to move food stocks from one village to another arguing that it might be given to the Northern Alliance fighters in Dar e Suf.

## Victims of war

21/09/00

Three families, Seyed, Shiite, composed of one widow, two couples and eight children (Eight members were not present, as they were still detained by the smuggler). They used to live in **Nawamad, a village nearby Bazar e Soukhte, west part of Dar e Suf district, Samangan province**. One year ago, the Taleban invaded Bazar e Soukht and Nawamad, and burned all the houses. All the inhabitants escaped to the mountains towards the south. Some families who had relatives in remote villages found shelter with them. Others, who had no relatives, built huts or slept under the trees.

There, it was very hard to find a way to get enough supplies, so the people ate wild plants. There was no medical assistance either. During the winter around eighty peoples died, mostly children, due to the cold, the lack of food or from food intoxication.

Three months ago, the Taleban launched an attack and one woman lost her husband and her brother-in-law. Both of them were fighters. So three of these families, who are relatives, decided to flee to Iran as they couldn't bear the situation anymore. They were afraid to stay in another province, thinking that if any kind of opposition occurred there, then the Taleban would come to them immediately.

26/12/00

One old man and his 4 year old daughter. They used to live in **Goubade Akhlabad, near the city of Bamyan**. This village was located near a front line between the Wahdat party and the Taleban. One and a half years ago the Taleban seized this village. Nearly 50 people died due to the heavy bombings. The Taleban took all the belongings of this old man, then, during a bombing, his house was destroyed. He himself lost his two wives and two sons. Then his remaining son died also while he was fighting. Along with other families he escaped with his 4 years old daughter to a remote village in the mountains. In order to find food, they were obliged to beg door to door, from one village to another. Because he is an old man with a young child, it became more and more difficult for them to survive in this way. When he heard that the fighting had started again in Yakawlang and in Panjâb, Bamyan province, he decided to flee to Iran

## Drought and economic situation

29/08/00

A family which used to live in **Lalasarjantal, Ghowr province**. They had suffered a drought for two years. This year was worse than last year. During the winter there was no rain and no snow. Since the spring there had been a shortage of food stocks, of water and the crop didn't grow. They couldn't feed their cattle, so they had to sell it, but for half the normal price. They said that Ngo's wanted to help them but the Taleban refused.

In their area, there are some fighters from the opposition. Sometimes, they arrived in the village and they said that this village helped the Taleban so now they must help them. After that, the Taleban came and said "you helped the Wahdat party so, now you must give us money". If they didn't give money, the Wahdat or the Taleban threatened to kill some men.

Because of the drought and the insecurity they decided to come to Mashhad where they have a relative.

One month ago they joined a group of 50 families, made up of 300 people, and left to Herat by truck. In Herat the 50 families separated and with different smugglers some went to Tehran, some to Mashhad through Zabol.

30/08/00

A family which used to lived in **Garmov near Lalasarjantal, Ghowr province**. Before 500 families were living there but now only 100 families remain. Some people died and a lot left the area. This year was worst than last year, they had no rain, no water and nothing grew; the sun burned everything. They only ate rice mixed with water. They received some aid but it was not enough to survive.

They also felt harassed by the Taleban who searched for young men and sent them to jail.

They decided to come to Iran, and the other inhabitants told them that all the villagers will soon do so. The head of the family took his cattle to Ghazni to sell it. But he sold it for a very low price. This money was just enough to reach Herat.

05/09/00

A family which used to live in **Lalesekreki, near Lalasarjantal, Ghowr province**. One year ago, the harvest was good but this year there was no snow, no rain. The head of the family used to work for another farmer, but



nowadays there is no harvest, so no work. He had no more food reserves. One day, the inhabitants of the village left with donkeys to get water, but after 3 days the search was in vain.

75 families decided to leave the village. It was mostly the shopkeepers who preferred to stay. They went to Kabul or Herat but most of them finally went to Pakistan and Iran.

The head of this family wanted to sell all his belongings in order to get cash for the trip, but the others preferred to buy food or to keep their savings for their own travel. So the family left with nearly nothing.

06/11/00

A family, which used to live in **Santu, a village near by Chaghcharan, Ghowr province**. The head of the family was a farmer. Last year he was affected by the drought but he still had enough livestock and he was hoping for a better coming year. But it rained neither last winter nor in spring. Then the crops started to grow but soon they dried. Some others villages received help from the UN to dig wells. They had to dig 20 meters deep to find water and two months later these wells dried up. Due to the lack of water the cattle had no grass to eat. A lot died. He himself killed his cattle before he lost them, in order to have some more food supplies. Some others inhabitants of his village left for Ghazni to sell their sheep and cows before they died but they got little money, the price of the meat was so low in the market.

At the end of the summer the situation did not improve. His wife was at the end of her pregnancy and he feared that they would all die during the winter. Fourty five days ago they fled to Herat with their two old mothers. There, his wife gave birth but the baby died the day after. They went to a camp for displaced people, but he waited for a long time in a queue and they were finally rejected. The rumour said that the head of this camp does not want to help Shiites.

Then he found a smuggler who helped them to cross the border to Iran.

### **The journey to Iran**

27/08/00

Three Hazara families, twelve members, from **Alichapan, Mazar, Balkh province**. Their journey was difficult because they had very young children, a woman in her last stage of pregnancy and an old grand-mother. They also had to hide themselves from the Taleban all the time.

In Herat they found a smuggler who could take them to Iran, up to Zabol. There, they stayed 10 days in a house and the smuggler asked 3000 Tomans per night per person, plus 100 000 Tomans (125 usd) per person for the whole trip Herat-Mashhad. They only had the money for the nights so the smuggler said they will pay the rest when they reach Mashhad. From Zabol, they took a mini bus accompanied by the smuggler, and the driver asked 75 000 Tomans. Then the police arrested them all at a checkpoint and sent them back to Afghanistan through Zabol with the smuggler.

This time, the same smuggler took them through the border by night, on foot. When they reached Zabol they stayed in the same house that they had stayed in previously. There, the pregnant woman gave birth outside the house behind a wall. More than one hundred Afghans were there, waiting to be conveyed to Isfahan, Qom and Tehran.

This time the smuggler took two of his brothers and one of their children as hostages. He put them, in groups of 5, onto different regular Iranian buses. The drivers again asked for 40.000 Tomans/pers. They finally arrived in Mashhad after a journey that had lasted 40 days and found two rooms to shelter these 12 persons in Gulshar.

They have no more money and they owe 2 025 000 Tomans (2500 US \$) to the smuggler and the drivers.

03/10/00

Three families, Hazara, Shiites, composed of 2 couples, one widow, one old woman and 7 children. 13 members are from **Nâvderaz, a remote village (4 hours from Panjab city), Bamyan province**. The journey was difficult, they walked a lot and sometimes they found transport in trucks. In Herat they slept in a brick factory closed at that time of the year, as they had no money to rent a room. Everyday they went to the area where the Hazara community is, begging from door to door for their food. One day the Taleban came to the factory. All the men were captured and forced to work without any payment or food. The women were left free and were able to search for food.

They managed to organize their departure to Iran. Three weeks ago, they left for Zabol with smugglers, walking across the border. Then, they took a bus to arrive finally in Mashhad ten days ago. The smuggler found a place for them to stay and he comes to see them everyday asking for his money. If they don't find it in one week, he will take a hostage. They have no relatives here so the only way to raise money, for the moment, is to shell pistachios. Their debt amounts to 10.300.000 Rials.

08/11/00

One old couple from **Sangcharak, Jowzjan province**, found a smuggler who took them, with three other families, through the Pakistan border in Taftan. Among the families was a widow, from Dar e Suf, with her daughter and her son. Then the smuggler put these four families onto two different buses, the old couple and the widow were not on the same bus. On its way to Mashhad the bus transporting the widow's family was stopped by the police and they were sent back to Afghanistan. But the police did not arrest the widow's son. When the old couple arrived in Mashhad, two days ago, the smuggler gave them the boy, telling them to take care of him. This old couple does not have any relatives in Mashhad, so for the moment they live with the boy in a mosque in Gulshar.

20/11/00

These 26 families from **Balkhob, Jowzjan province**, were able to raise money to escape to Iran. They travelled 10 days through Darachast, Dagha, Nayak, crossing several high snowy passes on foot, then through Yakowlang, Ghazni, Kandahar, Herat and Zabol, using donkey caravans and trucks, most of the time at night time to avoid the Taleban. They stayed in Zabol for 15 days, time for the smugglers to find a way to bring them to Mashhad. The smugglers rented rooms to hide them and they had to pay 1500 Tomans per day per person. They were not allowed to go out and only had bread and tea to eat.

When they left Zabol, the smugglers kept 7 hostages among these 26 families, who were divided into different groups. One of them, composed of 50 persons, got arrested and sent to a detention camp. Among these people, one man and his son succeeded in getting to Mashhad, but his wife and four others children were in the group that was arrested.

Now they live in the mosque waiting to find another place to stay. They have no news from the wife and the children. They are afraid to go out because three days ago, four men were arrested by the police. They had to give money to be released.

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