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# RETURN

Information Update

**1 – 15 March**

## SECURITY

### A. Return Routes Security Concerns:

**(i) From Iran:** Returnees are encouraged not to travel on these roads at night, and should seek shelter in one of the towns on route. Road robberies are a major security concern for returnees in the Western Region, particularly those travelling during the night on the route from Hirat to Farah and Kandahar. Robberies have become weekly occurrences, and the majority of them take place at night between Shindand and Dilaram.

Other civilians travelling in private cars or “flying coaches” have also been victims of such crimes, which in a minority of cases have become violent. Although security measures have been implemented on this route, including an increase in the number of military posts and security patrols at night, few alleged criminals have been apprehended and the number of robberies remains the same. Road robberies have also occurred in the other provinces, particularly in the districts of Farsi, Gulistan, and Ghormach (routes to Bala Morghab).

A series of civilian vehicles’ robberies on the main road from Nili to Tirinkut, Uruzgan have also been reported. Due to similar robberies, returnees should not travel at night on the road between Ghazni centre and Malistan district and on the connecting road between Malistan and Nawur. Returnees should follow the same advice while travelling on the road from Ghazni to Kabul, especially in Saalar area of Said Abad district of Maidan/Wardak province.

**(ii) From Pakistan:** UNHCR is concerned about the high number of road accidents involving returnee vehicles that occurred on the Torkham-Jalalabad road in 2002. Returnees should encourage their drivers to drive carefully and take frequent breaks. Although water facilities are available at Mohmandara and Puli Charkhi encashment centres, some returnees (especially elderly and children) have suffered from dehydration between Torkham and Kabul. Returnees are advised, especially during the warm weather season, to bring sufficient water with them for the journey, especially if travelling directly to Kabul.

### B. Security Concerns in the Areas of Return

- **Ghazni Province** (Malistan, Nawur, and Jaghori districts): UNHCR has received reports of ongoing security problems in Eastern Ghazni province (Malistan, Nawur, and Jaghori



districts). The problems have led to civilians being harassed by armed men, who are forcing civilians to pay illegal taxes. In some incidents, physical harm had been inflicted on civilians. The Kabul central government is aware of these security issues, and interventions are planned. However, until further notice, returnees should be aware that they may face personal security problems and have money extorted from them if they return to these areas.

- **Urozgan Province** (Sharistan and Dai-Kundi districts): In September 2002, serious security issues for civilians were reported due to clashes between rival military factions. Illegal taxation and forced recruitment of young men continues in Eastern and Northern Sharistan. Similar problems of illegal taxation, which often lead to physical abuse of civilians, persist in the Sangtakht, Jingan, and Ashterlai areas of Dai Kundi district. In January 2003, clashes between rival military factions were reported in the North-East of Dai Kundi.

The United Nations has approached the national Afghan authorities, as well as the Afghan Independent Commission on Human Rights, regarding the security problems in Sharistan and Dai-Kundi. Some measures are ongoing for resolving the situation; however, problems still persist and returning populations should be warned that they may face personal security issues on return.

- **Faryab Province** (Almar, Shirin Tagab, Pashtun Kot, Khwaja Sabs Posh, Dawlatabad districts): Although the security situation has significantly improved since early 2002, UNHCR has received reports that Pashtun civilians continue to face illegal taxation and forced recruitment by armed persons in Shirin Tagab, Khwaja Sabs Posh, Dawlatabad, Qaisar, and Pashtun Kot districts. Returnees should also be aware that land occupation by commanders is a continuing problem, and that the provincial court system may be unable to help them reclaim occupied land. Of particular concern in Almar district, where incidents of clashes between different groups have been recently reported, with many civilian groups being affected by consequent insecurity (illegal taxation, sporadic looting). During the last week of February, there was a clash in Pashtun Kot District between Jamiat and Jumbesh affiliates in the area of Zarshoy and Kata Kala.

- **Northwest:** The Working Group of the Return Commission in Faryab, Balkh, Samangan, Jawazjan and Saripul has identified similar problems. The Working Group, which includes members of the major political factions, the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, UNAMA, UNHCR, and is chaired by the Minister of Refugees and Repatriation has identified many factors for displacement as well as many impediments to return. These included localised fighting, the fear of previous incidents repetition, and lack of trust and confidence with regards to their personal safety. The working group also mentioned lack of shelter, educational and health centres, potable water, employment opportunities, and ruined irrigation system.

In order to take actions on these findings, the first official meeting of the Return Commission took place on 28 February 2003 in Mazar-I-Sharif. The meeting was chaired by the Minister of Refugees and Repatriation and attended by the High Commissioner for Refugees, and senior officials representing northern Afghanistan's main political and military factions: General Dostum (Jumbesh), General Atta Mohammad (Jamiat), and Sardar Saeedi (Hezb-I-Wahdat). The



Commission was established to investigate and deal with reasons for displacement from, and obstacles to return for refugees and IDPs to, Balkh, Faryab, Samanagan, Jawzjan, and Saripul. The Return Commission members endorsed the recommendations of the Working Group unanimously and promised actions to address the causes of displacement and obstacles to return—such as land occupation, forced recruitment, and illegal taxation.

**Repatriation programme in 2003:** There are no changes to repatriation procedures from Iran but there are some changes to the repatriation procedures for those returning from Pakistan. Refugees opting for UNHCR-assisted return should inform UNHCR field staff or their Refugee Village Administrator. A UNHCR mobile repatriation team will arrange to visit the camp.

**Voluntary Repatriation Forms (VRF):** A new Voluntary Repatriation Form (VRF) has already been introduced in order to prevent possible mistakes and to collect additional information that could be used for reintegration purposes in Afghanistan.

The new form will have five (5) copies: the **white** copy of VRF will remain with the head of household as a document, confirming that his/her family has been repatriated through UNHCR. **Blue** copy will be kept at UNHCR offices in the CoA (**except those, who return from Pakistan through Khost, who will be in possession of all five copies**). Returnees will arrive in Afghanistan having three copies (**green, yellow, pink**) of the VRF, in addition to the white one (**except those, who return through Khost**). These copies will be used for the release of assistance packages to the returnees; **Green copy for Transport assistance, Yellow copy for Non-food items, and Pink copy for food assistance.**

**Iris Technology:** All refugees seeking UNHCR-assisted return to Afghanistan will have to go through an iris machine, a computer-based technology that examines the eye and can detect if someone has been tested before.

All refugees 12 years of age and older will be scanned by iris recognition machines. If a match is found (if the person is found to have been iris tested before), a UNHCR staff member operating the machines will take down the name of the individual. The VRF will then be marked accordingly. If the iris recognition machines detect the entire family, the VRF will be recovered from the head of household. **Anyone who is discovered to have received assistance before will not be entitled to receive assistance.**

**UNHCR Assistance:** UNHCR staff will verify returnees before they enter the Encashment Centre. In addition to other verification methods, stamped family photographs will be presented together with VRF by the head of household. UNHCR staff member will verify the photograph with the physically present family members. **However, Female members of the family whose faces are covered by veil or Bruqa will not be disqualified, but they must go through the Iris Scan.**

Repatriating refugees (from neighbouring countries) will also receive returnee assistance packages, including food and non-food items.



**Food Assistance:** Food assistance for an average family of 5-6 will be 150kg of wheat.

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|---------------------------------|----------|
| - Family size: 2 persons        | - 50 kg  |
| - Family size: 3 to 4 persons   | - 100 kg |
| - Family size: 5 to 6 persons   | - 150 kg |
| - Family size: 7 to 9 persons   | - 200 kg |
| - Family size: 10 to 15 persons | - 250 kg |
| - Family size: 16 and more      | - 300 kg |

**Non-food Assistance:** Family packages of Non-food items will consist of the following material:

Family sizes:	Hygienic cloth	Plastic sheet	Soap
2 persons	2 sqm	1 piece	0,5 kg
3 to 4 persons	2 sqm	1 piece	1,0 kg
5 to 6 persons	2 sqm	2 pieces	1,5 kg
7 to 9 persons	4 sqm	2 pieces	2,0 kg
10 to 15 persons	6 sqm	3 pieces	3,0 kg
16 and more	8 sqm	4 pieces	4,0 kg

Single returnees will have to join other single returnees or families to make a minimum distribution unit.

**Note: Returnees should not approach just any Distribution Centre, but only the one marked on their VRF, otherwise they will not receive assistance.**

**Transport Assistance:**

As in 2002 transport assistance in cash will be provided to returnees at the Encashment Centres in Afghanistan. There are Encashment Centres operating in **Pul-I-Charkhi, Ghazni, Mohmand Dara, Zaranj, Daman, Mazar-I-Sharif, Pul-I-Khumri, Kunduz, and Herat**. Two additional Encashment Centres are scheduled to open in **Gardez and Khost**.

Returnees will be able to access basic assistance in each of the Encashment Centres, i.e. water, sanitation facilities, and emergency health care. In addition, children under 5 years of age will be vaccinated – **(families are advised to have at hand the previous vaccination cards, if they have them)** -and all family members will participate in a mine awareness session.

Returnees transiting through certain Encashment Centres will be provided with overnight facilities.

- **Depending** on final destination in Afghanistan, each family member will receive between 3 to 30 dollars.
- **Transport (cash)** assistance to returnees will be limited to 7 persons per family.



- **Children** under 12 months of age (less than one year) will receive only half of the amount given to other members of the family.
- **Returnees** from the camps in Pakistan will receive 5 dollars per family in addition to the established amount, if they transport construction material. Transportation of construction material will be certified by a special note made on the VRF at Registration Point in Pakistan.
- **Properly filled, signed and stamped VRFs** will be valid for seven days (from the day the returnees (from **Pakistan**) leave the Iris Recognition Centre – and returnees from Iran from the day they leave the registration centre - and arrive at the Encashment Centre inside Afghanistan), unless the delay is justified and accepted by the Repatriation Officer at the Encashment Centre. Returnees, who have to approach **two** Encashment Centres for cash assistance, must arrive at the first Encashment Centre within seven days.
- **Returnees** who arrive at the Encashment Centre, which is not mentioned in their VRF will lose their entitlement to cash assistance.
- The UNHCR assisted repatriation operation in Pakistan will run from Sundays to Thursdays. There will be no UNHCR-assisted repatriation on Fridays and Saturdays.

#### **Education:**

- All students must bring their school certificates from the country of asylum. Returnees from Pakistan should have their certificates verified by the Afghan Consulates in **Peshawar, Karachi or Quetta, and in Afghan Embassy in Islamabad**. There's a concern in Afghanistan about fake certificates acquired in Pakistan. The ruling also applies to returnees from **Iran** who want to register at Afghan universities.
- Afghanistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs has informed UNHCR Afghanistan office that a Memo no. 1773 dated March 8, 2003 has been faxed to Afghan Embassies and Consulates in Iran and Pakistan instructing them to waive attestation or certification fees on returning Afghan students' school certificates. The Memo came to force on March 8, 2003.

#### **Mass Information:**

Information on repatriation procedure will be disseminated in both the Country of Asylum (CoA) and Country of Origin (CoO), through pamphlets (the bi-weekly 'Return' update), radio programmes (the BBC programme 'Returnee'), newspapers, repatriation teams, UNHCR information centres, legal aid and health centres, field staff, and Community Services network.



## Transportation System in Afghanistan

### 1. Central Region:

- **Land Transportation system:** After the establishment of Afghan Interim Administration in the country, the transportation system began to improve.

**(i) Government Sector:** Government sector is reviving the former city-bus transportation system, which was completely destroyed and left with few vehicles during the past years. Prior to 1992, there were 1000 buses operating in the Government-owned Kabul City transportation system. After the conflict and before the AIA, however, only 78 buses in very poor condition remained in the system. JICA and AACA (Afghanistan Assistance Co-ordination Authority) have done a survey of transportation needs in Kabul City and are going to pass the survey result to the Government and other agencies wanting to assist in the transportation sector.

In the beginning of 2002, India offered a gift of 50 buses to Afghanistan. In the Tokyo Conference India pledged to provide Afghanistan with 400 more buses. So far 135 of these buses have arrived in Kabul. The rest are expected to arrive in the future. A number of technicians are sent to India monthly to attend a 15-day technical workshop on these buses in India, and to drive via Pakistan a number of these buses on their return to Afghanistan.

In addition, Iran, too, has sent five buses as a gift to Afghanistan. Japan also promised in the Tokyo Conference to provide 112 mini buses to Afghanistan. All buses so far given to Afghanistan are operating in Kabul City. The fare paid by the public is one Afghani. Once all the pledged buses are received in Afghanistan, the Ministry of Transportation plans to send some of these buses to other major cities in the country.

**(ii) Private Sector:** Private transport sector is registered with the Ministry of Transportation and currently covers the majority of transportation needs in the central region. There are taxis, mini buses, flying coaches, and various other types of vehicles used in this sector. The fare in private transportation is much higher—almost five times—than that of the Government. In Kabul City, for example, depending on the distance and type of vehicle, fare could range from 2 to 7 Afghanis. Private transport is currently the main conduit of goods and passengers between the provinces. Here, too, fare varies from distance to distance and types of vehicle used. For example, a passenger travelling to Mazar-I- Sharif is charged 200 Afs by bus, 300 by flying coach, 350 by Town Ace, and 600 by Corolla.

According to the government transport officials, main transportation problems in the central region are bad condition of the roads, lack of fuel, spare parts, and petrol pump stations and workshops along the high ways.

- **Air transportation system:** The Ministry of Civil Aviation with financial support from the World Bank is currently working on rehabilitating the Kabul International Airport, which includes installation of basic airport instruments, repair of lights along the runway, and repair and extension of its terminal.



- **Ariana Afghan Airlines:** Ariana Afghan Airlines is a government airline. The company owned 8 aeroplanes in the past, with regular domestic and international flights. Seven of the planes were damaged during the war. After the establishment of the AIA the company purchased two aeroplanes. Later, the Indian Government assisted AIA with three airbuses. An M24 plane has been recently purchased, bringing the total number to 7 aeroplanes.

AIA has domestic flights to Mazar-I- Sharif once a week and to Hirat thrice a week charging passengers between 1,300 and 2,000 Afs respectively. Its international flights are to Islamabad, Delhi, Amritser, Tehran, Dubai, Sharja and Frankfort. More external flights to China, Jidah, Bako, Moscow, Tashkent, Dushanbe and London are planned in the future.

## 2. Northern Region:

- **Land Transportation:**

(a) **Private Sector:** Private sector transportation includes big trucks, taxis and minibuses serving the people in the region.

Before state collapse, Kamaz trucks constituted the biggest Government transportation facilities, delivering business and other goods around the country. They were severely affected by the civil war. Currently, there are 30 goods transporting agencies, as well as 13 bus, and 7 taxi agencies in the Northern Region.

Taxis are serving people in the city, with a charge of 30 to 40 Afs according to the distance. Three minibuses are used in facilitating transportation of citizens to the remote city areas in Mazar, while other types of cars such as Corolla, Town Ace and Flying Coaches are used to travel to other areas in the region. Fares vary from distance to distance. For example, passengers have to pay 50 Afs for travelling to Sar-e-Pul and 220 Afs to Kabul.

People are travelling mainly by taxis and trucks in Pul-I Khumri and other cities of the region. Bad road condition and lack of transport facilities to some districts are major transportation problems. There are 16 truck and 10 taxi transport agencies functioning in Pul-I Khumri, 5 agencies in Takhar and Kunduz, and 6 agencies, including trucks, carrying passengers and goods in Faryab.

Fare varies from distance to distance. For example, passengers travelling from Pul-I Khumri to Kabul, Badakhshan, Takhar and Kunduz are charged between 100 – 400 Afs. In the same way, those travelling from Kunduz to Imam Sahib, Takhar, and Dashti Archi are charged between 100 to 125 Afs; from Takhar to FaizAbad, Farkhar and Rostaq between 250 and 300 Afs; from Faryab to Qaisar, Kohistan, Shirintagab, Dawlatabad and Andkhoy between 95 to 135 Afs; and from Maimana to Jawzjan, Badghis and Hirat between 100 to 450 Afs.

- **Air Transportation:** Ariana Afghan Airlines is the only company having flights from Kabul to Mazar –I- Sharif and from Mazar to Hirat once a week. Individuals travelling from



Mazar to Kabul have to pay 1,300 Afs and to Hirat 1600 Afs. The company has sub-offices in Sheberghan, Kunduz, and Faryab, but at present, there are no flights to these provinces.

### 3. Eastern Region:

- **Land Transport:**

**(i) Private Sector:** People in the region travel in Corolla, Town Ace, Land Cruiser cars between the provinces and within the cities. Fares vary from distance to distance and according to types of vehicles used. For example, travelling from Jalalabad to Kabul by a Corolla car costs 250 Afs while by mini-buses it costs 100 Afs per individual. Poor road conditions are the main transportation problems.

**(ii) Government Sector:** The government is working to rehabilitate the City-bus transport system and expect to receive 10 buses from the Ministry of Transportation for this purpose, something that will solve almost 50% of transportation problems in Nangarhar province.

- **Air Transport:** Ariana Afghan Airlines does not have flights to and from the Eastern Region.

### 4. Western Region:

#### **Land Transport:**

**(i) Government Sector:** There are two government transport agencies; Special Transportation Sector Agency (STSA) and Kamaz Transportation Management Agency (KTMA) functioning only in Hirat province of the region. STSA supervises private transport agencies and issues fare lists. All private transport agencies are registered with *STSA*.

KTMA represents the government transportation network (logistic side) and transports business and other goods within the country. STSA also assists KTMA through the private agencies by providing it with rental taxis, buses, and trucks when needed.

**(ii) Private Sector:** STSA supervises 9 trucking agencies (agencies that transport materials) with 4,192 vehicles and 4 travel agencies with 3,066 small and big vehicles. There are 955 vehicles serving the citizens around the city.

Fare is 30 Afs for taxis and 3 Afs for buses within the city. However, for those travelling from Hirat to surrounding villages, fare varies between 30Afs to 100Afs per person, and to other provinces between 175 Afs (Kandahar) and 875 Afs (Kabul).

Khurasan Travel Agency (Iran) signed an agreement with Hari private bus transport agency (Hirat) last year to serve passengers between Hirat and Mashhad. According to this agreement,



most of the time Hari transport agency transports passengers up to Islam Qala. Khurasan agency receives them at the Dogharon side of the border and transports them to Mashhad.

Poor condition of the roads and shortage of transportation facilities to the districts and villages, especially during the nights, are the main transportation problems in the region. In the past, animals like donkeys and cow were used as transportation means between villages, but the number of animals has been reduced by drought and war.

Transport agencies are paying 3% of their total income to the government as taxes. The fare for the goods varies between 300Afs to 2,000Afs/MT depending on the distance transported. The average fare is 500Afs per person from Hirat to Cheghcheran City in Ghor province, and, of course, it varies from distance to distance. People are travelling by Flying Coach, Surf, Town Ace, Russian Jeeps, and trucks between provincial cities. There are around 80 vehicles in Ghor, which are not sufficient for the whole province.

There are three government and three private transport agencies working in Farah province, operating with minibuses and small Toyota cars both with the same fare rates, which varies from 300 Afs to 1150 Afs from Farah to Hirat and other cities including Kabul.

- **Air transportation:** The Ariana airline flies to Hirat province trice a week. Also, Aseman Airline from Iran had a test flight to Hirat on the 07<sup>th</sup> of March 2003. Once agreement is reached, there will be a direct flight between Hirat (Afghanistan) and Mashad (Iran) twice a week.

## 5. Southern Region:

- **Land transportation system**

**(i) Private Sector:** In the private sector, people are travelling by different types of vehicles, and as in other regions, fare varies from distance to distance and according to different types of vehicles used. Fare is between 3 to 6 Afs within the city and between 30 to 650 Afs to other cities in the region. A large number of Rickshaws are also serving the citizen in Kandahar city. Trucks are used to transport business goods to and from other provinces in the region and are charging between 1450 to 2500 Afs (to Kabul), and 600 to 900 Afs. (to Farah). Main transportation problems in the region are lack of fuel, which causes fluctuation in fare rates, and bad road condition.

**(ii) Government Sector:** Government transport company, Kamaz, is working with 10 trucks and 15 buses. Seven of the buses need to be repaired and 5 are rented to other government departments or NGOs. The remaining 3 buses are operating in the city, charging 3 Afghanis per person.



Kandahar transport department is working on improving the city transport system by receiving more buses from the Ministry of Transportation in the near future, and plan to repair other old buses of the company as well.

- **Air Transport:** There are no flights to Kandahar as the Coalition Forces have exclusive use of the Kandahar airport. The airport does, however, receive UN and ICRC flights.

### **UNHCR/BBC Radio Programme:**

There is a joint BBC/UNHCR radio programme specifically aimed at Afghan refugees, IDPs and returnees. The programme deals with the situation in Afghanistan, including security, development activities of the Afghan government, United Nations and other aid agencies, various rehabilitation and reconstruction projects being planned or implemented, and the difficulties that the Afghans, especially returnees, are facing. Last year nearly two million Afghans returned home after years of exile and displacement and many more are expected to return home this year. The BBC radio programme is part of UNHCR's efforts to provide an accurate account of the situation in Afghanistan to those wishing to return home, and to offer a forum for a wider debate on all aspects of repatriation and reintegration.

The programme is broadcast from Saturday to Wednesday (5 Days a week):

- **1<sup>st</sup> edition:** 0730 to 800 GMT = 1100 to 1130 Iran time, 1200 to 1230 Afghan time, and 1230 to 1300 Pakistan time.
- **2<sup>nd</sup> edition:** 12.00 to 1230 GMT = 1530 to 1600 Iran time, 1630 to 1700 Afghan time and 1700 to 1730 Pakistan time.

The programmes are broadcast on Short wave frequencies of 15420 kHz (19 meter band, and 17870 kHz (16 meter band).

**The programme has a section for the listeners' letters. If you have any comments or questions please write to the following addresses and the BBC will include them in the programme:**

- **Afghanistan:** BBC, Post Box No. 1, Central Post Office, Kabul, Afghanistan.
- **Pakistan:** BBC, Post Box 255, University Town, Peshawar, Pakistan.
- **Iran:** UNHCR (BBC) – P.O.Box No. 91775 – 1876, Mashhad, Iran.

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