

# EVAP Ep. 14A: Horia Mosadiq

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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## SPEAKERS

Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall, Horia Mosadiq

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**H** Horia Mosadiq 00:56  
Thank you very much, Jaclyn, for inviting me.

**J** Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 00:58  
Welcome to Expert Voices on Atrocity Prevention by the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect. I'm Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall, Research Director at the Global Centre. This podcast features one-on-one conversations with practitioners from the fields of human rights, conflict prevention and atrocity prevention. These conversations will give us a glimpse of the personal and professional side of how practitioners approach human rights protection and atrocity prevention, allowing us to explore challenges, identify best practices, and share lessons learned on how we can protect populations more effectively. Today I am joined by Horia Mosadiq, an Afghan and women human rights defender, a journalist, and Director of Conflict Analysis Network. Horia, it's been one year since the Taliban militarily took over Afghanistan. Could you set the stage for our listeners - what happened last August, and what has been the general situation in the year since?

**H** Horia Mosadiq 01:16  
I can't really believe that, you know, it is just the anniversary of Taliban taking of Afghanistan. And it has been like, one year, like, of course, Taliban did not take over Afghanistan militarily. But they took it part of a compromise agreement made between the US and our president and his allies. So this has been unfortunately, the deal. We were... Afghanistan was handed over to the Taliban rather than Taliban being able to take it militarily. And the issue with like, in the past one year, I think, this has been the most difficult one year, you know, since I have started my activism, of course, this is the second time that Taliban have taken over Afghanistan. But I think this time, it affected us so much, and it has affected us at so many levels, from personal to professional to, you know, all sorts of levels. And this has been because, you know, in the

past one year, we all have invested so much in Afghanistan, we all have paid such a high price with our personal life with, you know, with our blood, and then suddenly we saw everything just given and handed over to the Taliban. So in the past one year, it has been extremely difficult for all of us, you know, like it has been, like, every day, we wake up with the reports of Taliban, you know, killed someone, you know, executed someone, taking a woman to prison, disappearances. You know, like, and so many other atrocities and human rights violations that is happening all over the place, like woman are deprived of their very basic fundamental rights such as access to work, access to education. And unfortunately, this has become a daily occurrence for the past one year, like every day, we wake up, like there is no day goes by that we do not receive a report that whether Taliban have summarily executed someone, or some people have disappeared, or some people were, you know, abducted and taken into detention, or, you know, like woman or being killed or disappeared or, you know, being beaten up and their human rights have been violated on a daily basis. Unfortunately, this has been our one year since Taliban took over.

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Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 04:20

The situation you've just described in terms of restrictions on women's rights and attacks against civilians. I know that a lot of this has particularly targeted civil society actors, including women's rights activists, human rights defenders, as well as reporters. How do you think this has affected human rights monitoring and reporting that comes from within Afghanistan?

H

Horia Mosadiq 04:49

It did affect significantly. First of all, we are dealing with de facto authority, that they do not abide with any form of law or legal framework. Simply in Afghanistan, we have an absence of a legal framework. And according to the Taliban, they are implementing Sharia, but then the interpretation of Sharia is different from person to person, from village to village, from district to district. And with that, you know, like the other problem that we are facing for the past one year, with all the atrocities and human rights violations that are happening, there is zero accountability, because Taliban who are once, you know, killing, assassinating, attacking human rights defenders, journalists, and, you know, civil society activists. They are right now in charge of the government, you know, who do we go and complain to? In the past one year, like tons of human rights defenders and civil society activists were arrested, disappeared, abducted, killed, and this has been the same situation with journalists. Freedom of expression, which was one of our greatest achievement post-2001 in Afghanistan, you know, it doesn't exist anymore. Journalists are simply being, you know, detained and tortured for inviting in their talk show a Taliban critic. People who are daring to criticize Taliban's policy, or woman who are protesting on the streets, or men who are objecting to what is happening in the country. They all face severe punishment by the Taliban. And those punishment is from, you know, abduction, disappearances, detention, and unlawful detention, without due diligence, and disappearances to also, you know, assassination. You know, some of the people are getting killed by unidentified gunmen, and no one knows who they are. And you have no way of holding, you know, the perpetrators to account, and this simply because the legal framework and the protection mechanism that we had before, it doesn't exist anymore. Like simply, we are just left to fend for ourselves. And, you know, if you're lucky enough to survive, we would. And this has been also one of the main reasons that so many human rights activists and journalists, they had to flee the country, because after you're being attacked, threatened, and

some of them that were detained, they have to sign a document and, you know, guarantee the Taliban that you will not speak against the Taliban. And if they speak, then their family can face the consequences. So this has been our situation for the past one year, like the freedom of expression is at its lowest level since the Taliban took over. And if you compare it with what was happening before that - woman rights, human rights, freedom of association, freedom of assembly, and the political, social and economic rights, everything is, you know, it whether it doesn't exist, or it's at the lowest level.

J

Jaelyn Streitfeld-Hall 08:51

You just mentioned, specifically, women's rights. And I know that that's one of the things that had significantly changed in the time period when the Taliban didn't have leadership. But now that they're back in power, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has characterized the steps they've taken as institutionalized, systematic oppression of women. Can you describe some of the recent restrictions they've placed on women in particular and the impact that has had on people?

H

Horia Mosadiq 09:20

Well, yeah, like in the past few months, Taliban not only, you know, they refuse to open schools for the girls, and they refuse to allow women to go back to their offices and continue to their work. They also impose restrictions on movement. So women are not allowed to leave their home without being accompanied by a male chaperone or woman are not allowed to travel a certain distance without a male accompany, and also head to toe, covering in burka, or, you know, in other forms of, you know, like it's called hijab by the Taliban have been imposed on women. Also, most recently, Taliban announced that women who are part of the government, part of their civil servants, you should introduce a male relative to come and replace them in the government. So, you know, with all that, like, what it really reminds us, like, back in 1990s, when Taliban were in charge of the government in Afghanistan, we knew that they are the only gender apartheid regime in the world. We knew that they are the most anti-woman group in the world. And we kept warning, we kept warning the US, we kept warning the West, we kept warning the United Nations. But unfortunately, no one believed that. And they always spoke to us about "like-minded Taliban, Taliban have changed, and Taliban are not the same as they were in 1990s". And we keep telling them, yes, we know that they are not the same Taliban as they were in 1990s because they became more vicious, they became more violent, and they also learned how to play diplomacy. They learned a lot, how to trick and how to lie - how to lie bluntly, and not being held to account. But I believe that the international community, they wanted to believe what Taliban are telling them. They wanted to not believe us, and they didn't want to listen to us because they want the Taliban to return. They want the Taliban to be part of the, you know, whatever so-called peace solution they wanted, this is what they were really doing. So, one year after, I think, many of the Western diplomats or UN officials, as an Afghan woman, I think, honestly, they're just shedding crocodile tears. This is, you know, like, they knew what will come with the Taliban. They knew how Taliban will be and how Taliban are looking like, but they just wanted to sell this idea of like-minded Taliban, or Taliban have changed and this and that, to their own people, and also to their own governments. While you know, we all knew what will come with it. So this has been the situation like this is not just about women rights, and girls right, to education, to employment, and to political participation. But then, you see at the systematic discrimination against other ethnic groups across

Afghanistan, the persecution of religious minorities, the persecution of other ethnic groups in Afghanistan, like you have a cabinet of all male from one ethnic group, you know, like woman, and people from other ethnic groups are totally being sidelined. And the worst is that, you know, like right now, the atrocities that are happening in Panjshir, in Andara, in Daykundi, in Balkh province, it is not getting highlighted in international media. And if you look at the level of atrocities that you're committing in these places, and then if you look at the level of atrocities, they are also committing in Pashtun-dominated area, particularly against former members of the Afghan national security forces, former members of the Afghan government, against women, against girls, and you're not being reported simply because people are so scared to report. And unfortunately, you barely hear that in the international or local media, and people who dare to report, they face severe consequences for that.

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Jaelyn Streitfeld-Hall 14:22

Thank you for that. I think you've touched on this a bit, but how have threats to minority groups, such as the Hazara, for example, changed since the Taliban took over. Have targeted attacks against them escalated? I know that the the persecution has escalated, but what other threats and atrocities are they facing?

H

Horia Mosadiq 14:47

Well, it is not just Hazaras but also Hindus. Unfortunately, the last members of the Hindu community, they left Afghanistan a couple of weeks ago, because Afghanistan turned into a hell for them. You know, they have been attacked in their places of worship. They have been attacked in the streets, they have been attacked and their properties have been confiscated, and they experience so much atrocities. And we also know the background that back in 1990s, how Taliban treated Hazaras and Hindus. And this has been exactly the same situation now. Since Taliban took over, particularly at the beginning of 2022, we have seen a spike of attacks against Hazaras. Some of those attacks were blamed on ISIS, particularly the attacks that happened on the places of education, on the places of worship, and, you know, places like that. But then we also see that how Taliban are forcing Hazaras to leave their areas because they are confiscating their lands, like there is an enforced displacement is happening in Hazara areas, and Taliban are taking their lands, their properties. We know that the atrocities including, you know, mass killings are happening in certain parts of Afghanistan, where it is a Hazara dominated areas such as in Daykundi and in Balkhab, the streets. And then what we also see that, you know, the level of restrictions, and I would say like, the level of restrictions and limitations that you're imposing on the people in Hazara dominated area is much, much higher. And this is also similar to the situation in Panjshir and in Andara and in certain other parts of Afghanistan. So like, access to education, access to health, access to many other services in those areas is absolutely being to nonexistence. And even when it comes to the aid delivery, you know, for the humanitarian aid, you would barely see that Taliban would distribute any humanitarian aid in conflict affected areas where it is dominantly Hazaras, or, you know, Panjshiris or people from Andara or other places. So, like, it is not just, you know, the discrimination in sense of the, you know, political participation, even access to services, access to, you know, humanitarian aid and access to justice, it has been absolutely to nonexistence,. Like, just few days ago, I had a report that in one of the Taliban intelligence detention center, 480 people are detained. From 480 people, over 400 of them are from Panjshir. And, you know, something like just above 70 people, they are from, again, from Andara and from Khost and

districts of Baghlan, where the resistance against Taliban is happening. And many of these people, they have nothing to do with resistance. And the reason that you're being arrested, the reason that you are being killed, the reason that they are being, you know, tortured, simply because you belong to that area, not because they have been actively participating in anti-Taliban armed resistance, even people who participate in armed resistance, they don't have the chance to get into a detention, they're just killed on the spot.

**J** Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 18:53

I think that's such an important observation that it is not just about resistance. It's not just about those who are seen as a threat to the government, **or** to the Taliban. It's really largely about who you are, and where you're from and what you believe.

**H** Horia Mosadiq 19:12

Absolutely, absolutely. Yeah, because even if you see, like, there wasn't any armed resistance, for example, in Daykundi, you know, there wasn't any armed resistance by Hindus, you know like, and I think Hindus are the most peaceful citizens of Afghanistan, you know, but then the atrocities that they face and the discrimination that they have faced, the level of persecution they face, it is just unimaginable. Like, I can't believe that how someone can turn the situation so unbearable to someone that you know, the last group of Hindus they have to leave Afghanistan with their holy book, because they all will be killed.

**J** Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 20:01

I think when the takeover first happened last year, you know, Afghanistan was the cover of newspapers everywhere around the world and the main news story, and for a variety of reasons both in terms of time and the invasion of Ukraine, it is, it has sort of become less of a spotlight issue, unfortunately. In addition to the Hindu highlight that you've just mentioned, you know, are there other stories of things happening in Afghanistan that you think are not widely reported by the international community, either in the media or in UN reports that you think are particularly relevant to atrocity risks that should be getting more attention?

**H** Horia Mosadiq 20:49

Definitely. Yeah. I think one of the issues that is happening, more and more since Taliban took over, is we are, everyday we are receiving so many cases of femicide, you know, so many women are getting killed. And many of them, you're being somehow said that a woman, a woman's body was found here or there in the corners of the city. We didn't see such a thing before, you know, like, I'm not saying that women were not killed. And even on that time, the majority of women who were killed and executed it was under the Taliban-controlled areas. And now it has increased so much, that you know, like, we have so many reports from different parts of the country, you know, from Pashtun area, the Hazari area, the Tajik area, but then you see that, you know, the body of a young girl, the body of a young woman is being recovered, and she was shot dead, and she's unidentified. Some of them if you're lucky, they will, their identity will be revealed. But for the vast majority even, we don't know who they are and what

were the circumstances that they were killed. This is one of the issues. And second, the level of violence against women and girls, you know, because in the past, we have Ministry of Women's Affairs, we have Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, who are systematically recording all the cases of violence against women. And also we have family response units within the police. And we had like a special attorney office for tackling violence against women. Now, all those departments, all those institutions have been dissolved, and they don't exist. So the only way for us to hear about cases of violence against women is through social media. And this is only when the case gets to the level, for example, if a woman is killed by her husband, by her brother, by her father, or whoever, or if a woman is, you know, being badly beaten up, and she ends up in the hospital and someone in the hospital, maybe a doctor or a nurse, they would just break the news to the social media. So then, you know, other than that we have, we hear nothing about that. And we don't know, as much as I heard that so many of these women, when they are facing violence, they have nowhere to go. If they go to the Taliban, they are telling them: yes, your husband, your father, your brother, they are allowed to beat you, they are allowed to treat you like that, because they are your sole owner, you know, they are your sole guardian, and and you cannot do anything against them. And unfortunately, you don't hear much about that in the international media or even local media.

**J** Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 23:57

It's that dual pressure of the lack of institutions to turn to and just that they're creating that permissive environment and sort of sending the message that you're allowed to do this against women, because you know, that's your role. And also, we're not going to punish it. You know, I think you've touched on this a few times, the absence of a legal framework now, the fact that in many cases the perpetrators are the people in a place of power. And you know, I think you've very powerfully said earlier in the conversation, who do we complain to? Who do we who do we turn to for these issues? You know, and I know that particularly given how Afghanistan got to the situation it's in now you know, the international community doesn't feel like the answer but to the extent that someone outside of Afghanistan could make a difference, what would you think the international community could do to place, put in place more robust protection measures for civilians, or even for you know, human rights defenders and journalists?

**H** Horia Mosadiq 24:15

Absolutely. Well, I think the international community can do several things, you know. Like, first of all, what we really expect from the international community to put more pressure on the Taliban, which unfortunately, at the moment, we don't see anything. We see lack of consistency, we see mixed messages, we see, like, one is trying to be tougher, and the other is extending a red carpet to the Taliban. So these are like the challenges that we are facing at the moment. And I think, what could be done? You know, first of all, I think the international community should pressure the Taliban, and that pressure need to come through putting travel ban on senior members of the Taliban, it should be asset freeze of the senior members of the Taliban. And it should be much more tougher reactions towards this group, just by talking and, you know, like, I would say, like, condemning, or saying something through Twitter. This is not going to solve our problem, this is not going to help us, you know, and the only way that it could change things is when the Taliban are hold to account. And that accountability needs to come through, you know, tougher sanctions and actions by the international community, including the UN. And second, I think my personal request will be that the international

community need to accelerate the process of relocation and resettlement of Afghan human rights defenders and journalists at risk. Unfortunately, for some of the cases, we have to wait for months and months, before even we hear that a visa is being processed or not. A lack of financial resources is another issue, like we have tons of human rights defenders at risk in Afghanistan, in Pakistan, in different parts of the world, and they are waiting for the settlement, they have nothing really, they are living with nothing. And when it comes to the financial resources, we don't have access to those financial resources to support it. So I think these are like, you know, what, if I categorize that it needs to be political support, financial support, resettlement support, and more tougher pressure on the Taliban.

J Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 27:50

Thank you, for I was going to ask, as a follow up, you know, what different needs populations who are still in Afghanistan have versus those who have been able to leave the country, but obviously still have, you know, very specific risks to themselves, wherever they've relocated to, or in terms of thinking about the prospects of, you know, someday returning, you know, if the circumstances allowed.


H Horia Mosadiq 28:21

Yeah, I think, you know, for definitely, I think for the ones that already left the country, we have some of the people who are, you know, in the process of resettlement to certain countries, and I think, at least some of the countries, they have been very generous in offering the support to Afghan human rights defenders and journalists such as Canada, Germany, France, and you know, like, yeah, I think these were among the most generous ones. But then we also have some other countries that have stepped in and supported. But I think, you know, given the situation that is happening right now, in the country, it is not enough and more need to be done. So, but at the same time, I think for the ones who are inside the country, we also acknowledge that it will not be possible to, you know, take out all 35 million people. You know, so many people are starving in Afghanistan, so many women lost their jobs, they are the sole breadwinner of their families, and they have nothing to live with. I think humanitarian assistance, particularly aid that is targeted for women, aid that is given specifically to women, particularly women household heads, that should be also a priority. We don't see much happening like, even if you see the aid distribution by the UN or by the Taliban themselves, it's all men. Like where are the women? Afghanistan is a country that has been in war for the, for over 42 years. You know, like, we have hundreds of thousands of widows, we have millions of orphans all over the country. So with all these population, how we can ensure that access to aid is a, you know, it's there for these population in need. Because you, especially if women are not allowed to travel without a male chaperone, if women are not allowed to leave their homes. And then with all these restrictions, you're simply not only taking the opportunity of a livelihood from them by the Taliban, but also you have taken away the opportunity of accessing aid.

J Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 30:55

Absolutely. This is one of the most critical things we talk about, when we think about atrocity prevention, and the gender dimension of atrocity crimes is that it's never just thinking about, you know, women as unique victims of specific types of crimes, but also the impact in societies

like this where, you know, the men may have been killed in conflict or are no longer around and women don't have the rights and access to resources anymore.

 Horia Mosadiq 31:31  
Absolutely. Absolutely.

 Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 31:33  
Thank you for joining us for this episode of Expert Voices on Atrocity Prevention. If you'd like more information about the Global Centre's work on R2P, mass atrocity prevention, or populations at risk of mass atrocities, visit our website at [globalr2p.org](http://globalr2p.org) and connect with us on Twitter and Facebook at GCR2P.