



Association for
**Iranian
Studies**

May 14, 2021

We write on behalf of the Association of Iranian Studies (AIS) and its Committee of Academic Freedom to express our horror and deep sorrow over the bombing of a school in Kabul, Afghanistan, in a largely Hazara ethnic minority neighborhood, which has, to date, killed at least 85 and injured over 150, mostly adolescent school girls between the ages of 11 and 18. This tragic event underscores the continued violation of women and girls' rights to education and is further evidence that women and girls are the first and foremost victims of the rise of religious fundamentalism and multiple foreign interventions over the past few decades.

AIS is a private, non-profit academic society founded in 1967 to support and promote scholarship and research on Iran and the Persianate world at the international level. As an independent, non-partisan, non-political, multidisciplinary international community, the association publishes *Iranian Studies*, the principal journal in the field. AIS membership includes over 500 scholars, students, academic and other professional researchers. We are committed to encouraging the free exchange of ideas and academic freedom of speech, both within and beyond the geographical boundaries of Iran. The Association's Committee on Academic Freedom has been following the concerning news concerning of the recent bombing of an Afghan girls' school in Kabul.

On May 8, 2021, three bomb blasts exploded close to the entrance of a school, which is located in a largely Shi'ite Muslim area, populated by the Hazara ethnic minority, as students were leaving for the day. The school's pupils are male in the morning, while female students attend classes in the afternoons. The bombs went off in the afternoon in an apparent direct attack on the female students.

The AIS CAF is further dismayed and alarmed by the scale and audacity of such an attack, so clearly targeting civilians, mostly female and children, in overt violation of international laws of war and human rights. We appeal to the Afghan government, international forces, and US troops to prioritize innocent civilians in this conflict. We further call on these leaders to ensure the safety of the Hazara minority, who have often been targets of Taliban attacks and are increasingly vulnerable in the face of the international troop withdrawal, an agreement made with the Taliban, and not the Afghan government proper. We also demand that authorities respect and protect the rights of youth and children, regardless of gender, to earn an education and to seek to better their lives for themselves and their families.

We remind leaders of their obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention, relative to civilians caught up in war and also Protocol II, which relates to the protection of victims of non-international armed conflicts, to protect the lives of civilians. The impending troop withdrawal

has emboldened non-state actors to challenge the present Afghan government and to vie for control, further destabilizing the country and region. As such, we call on international forces to be vigilant in the face of such civilian attacks.

Despite statements of support for freedom, education, and minority and women's rights in Afghanistan from different parties, the Association of Iranian Studies (AIS) and its Committee of Academic Freedom remain deeply concerned about the state of academic freedom and the right to education, especially for girls and ethnic minorities in Afghanistan.