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PHR Calls upon Interim Administration of Afghanistan, International Community to Protect Alleged Mass Gravesites in Afghanistan

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(Boston, MA) A new Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) report, Preliminary Assessment of Alleged Mass Gravesites in the Area of Mazar-I-Sharif, Afghanistan, ([view photos](#)) concludes that there is evidence of recent disposal of human remains at two mass grave sites near Mazar-I-Sharif. Although these reports have not been confirmed, eyewitnesses interviewed by PHR suspect that the bodies at a site found near the village of Shebarghan include Taliban prisoners who were transported to this site in truck containers. Until there is a formal investigation of the sites, the exact number and identification of bodies in the sites cannot be determined.

PHR called on Afghanistan's Interim Government Chairman Hamid Karzai and the international community to provide protection of these sites. The Boston-based organization recognizes that the government of Afghanistan is not in the position to secure these sites while the US, the UK and other international actors have the capacity, and the responsibility, to assure that the sites are protected. The examination of bodies and dignified burial of remains will contribute to the truth and accountability process, which is essential for future peace and stability in Afghanistan.

The report documents the work of two PHR delegations that recently conducted fact-finding and preliminary forensic assessments of alleged mass gravesites in Mazar-I-Sharif and its environs. In January 2002, a PHR fact-finding delegation spent five days investigating human rights violations and health needs in this region that included preliminary information on a number of mass gravesites. As a follow-up to the January trip, in February PHR sent forensic experts to conduct a more detailed assessment of

the surfaces and location of these sites. They were not able to conduct a thorough investigation.

A number of sites that PHR visited relate to incidents dating to the conflict over the control of Mazar-I-Sharif in 1997 and 1998. It is alleged by witnesses that some of the sites contain many dozens of victims. The forensic team also found evidence of recently disposed human remains in two of the nine gravesites that were visited.

Eyewitnesses reported to PHR that they had passed the suspected mass gravesite outside the town of Shebarghan some time between late December 2001 and early January 2002, observing three container trucks backed into the suspected mass gravesite. This account and others are of great concern as there still remains no reliable accounting for the numbers of prisoners who were captured in the fall of Kunduz and Mazar-I-Sharif in late 2001.

In addition to calling for the protection of these sites, PHR urges the responsible authorities to immediately account for the numbers of Taliban prisoners who were allegedly taken from Kunduz. Furthermore, all alleged past, present and ongoing human rights violations and war crimes should be investigated regardless of ethnicity or political affiliation of the perpetrator or victim.

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