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LEGAL AID BOARD

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Information on whether owners of music and/or DVD and/or video shops have been attacked or threatened by Taliban or other extremists groups

In a section titled “Pakistan’s Talibanisation” an *International Crisis Group* report states:

“The Taliban groups expound Islam as a vehicle of social and political empowerment. Their Sharia courts claim to resolve cases that were pending in officially constituted tribunals for years. In fact, they seek to reform society along radical Deobandi lines, as expressed in attacks on girls’ schools, barber shops, DVD and CD stores, and residents perceived to be engaged in immoral activities.” (International Crisis Group (13 March 2009) *Pakistan: The Militant Jihadi Challenge*, p.12)

An article published online by the English-language Pakistani newspaper *Dawn* states:

“No count has been kept of the video shops destroyed by the Taliban in the course of their offensive against Pakistani culture. Music has had its detractors in plenty and the MMA government, foisted on the NWFP by Musharraf, had declared music to be a vice in 2002. Since then music has been treated as an enemy. It has been targeted regularly. The campaign first began in the form of attacks on shops and music centres. Then musicians, those gentle artists who soothe the soul, were threatened and they either fled or gave up their art. Some had to pay with their life.” (Dawn (5 August 2009) *The Taliban and music*)

A *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* report states:

“In Pakistan’s Afghan border regions, the month of January began with the imposition of harsh new directives. As of January 2, women in the region were prohibited from holding compulsory identification cards bearing their photographs. Widows were warned against applying for or accepting government handouts. Video DVD shops and television viewing were banned. In some districts, women were barred from shopping. On January 5, additional restrictions came into effect banning coeducation and alcohol. Those who violate the new dictates could even face the death penalty. The new regulations are being imposed by an increasingly aggressive Taliban, which argues they are tenets of Islamic Shari’a law. Local officials say the militia is seeking to expand its influence throughout the Pashtun border regions to the whole of Pakistan’s Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP). And this, locals say, they are doing by killing as many perceived opponents as they can. Thousands of civilians, soldiers, and Taliban fighters have been reported killed in the past five years.

Officials like Sardar Hussain Babak, the province's minister for education, who says the Taliban is using Shari'a as a pretext for conducting a reign of terror. 'Today I'm asking you: Is slaughtering people [allowed] by Shari'a? Is closing schools [compatible with] Shari'a? Does Shari'a permit [video DVD] shops to be burned down? Babak asks. 'All of these acts are part of a complicated conspiracy against this land in the sacred name of religion and Shari'a.'" (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (6 January 2009) *Worries In Pakistan That Taliban Imposing 'Parallel' Government*)

An *Agence France Presse* report refers to the activities of Pakistani extremists as follows:

"Brandishing bamboo staves and driven by radical Islam, dozens of bearded madrassa students storm into DVD shops in Pakistan's leafy capital and order them to close -- or else. The scenes look more like Taliban-era Afghanistan where the harsh movement's 'Vice and Virtue' squads once spread terror, but they are happening a few minutes' walk from the seat of the Pakistani government. Store owner Owais Dar said the morality patrols began about a week ago and the latest was on Sunday, days after the government capitulated to the students in a standoff over the kidnap of an alleged brothel owner. 'A group of students came and warned me to shut my business and not to play songs from Indian and Pakistani films because it is against Sharia (Islamic law),' Dar said at his shop selling DVDs and video games in bustling Melody Market. 'How can these students stop us from running a business which our own government has not even declared illegal?' he added. Yunus Sheikh, whose movie shop in nearby Aabpara market was also targeted on Sunday, said: 'We are really scared -- it is nothing but hooliganism. When we see these boys coming with their batons we just close our shop.'" (Agence France Presse (3 April 2007) *Taliban-style vice squads spread fear*)

An article from *The Nation* states:

"Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan has warned the shopkeepers of the Rainbow Centre to shut their video shops and end 'business of obscenity'. The copy of the letter was obtained by The Nation on Friday. The letter further said that this business is spoiling Muslim youth and society. 'Pakistan was created in the name of Islam but now wine shops and prostitution dens are common', it added. The letter said: 'instead of the prevention of such kind of activities, govt is supporting and promoting obscenity. It is obligation of the all the Muslims to stop such kind of activities'. The shopkeepers were warned to close their shops or they will be kidnapped and also their shops will be destroyed." (The Nation (Pakistan) (22 August 2008) *End 'business of obscenity': Taliban*)

A report from *The Observer* on the bombing of a music market states:

"The bomb was far from the biggest seen on the North-West Frontier but it did its job well. Placed in a water cooler, it ripped through the Nishtar Abad music market, sending shards of glass and splintered CDs in all directions. 'Miraculously, no one was killed,' said Mohammed Azam, who was shopping for presents for the Muslim holiday of Eid this weekend. Twenty people were injured,

three seriously, and a dozen shops gutted. For the police chief of Peshawar, the dusty Pakistan city 40 miles from the Afghan border, it was clear who planted last Tuesday's bomb. 'We suspect the involvement of those people who in recent months had sent letters to the CD and video shops, warning them to shut their businesses, saying it is against Islam,' Abdul Majid Marwat said." (The Observer (14 October 2007) *The new Taliban*)

In a section titled "Rise of the radicals" this report states:

"The Taliban believe in a strict interpretation of Islamic law and last month produced a constitution. Executions are carried out in public. Women are fully covered and are not permitted education. Men should wear beards, and light entertainment - music, television and film - is deemed to be anti-Islamic." (ibid)

In a section titled "Violent campaign" a *BBC News* report states:

"The girls who turned to music concerts and stage shows, often held in Peshawar, the capital of NWFP, were thrown out of business when the cultural shows were banned. Some of them benefited temporarily when the aficionados and businessmen on NWFP's dance and music scene diversified into the video CD business, producing and distributing long plays and dance sessions on VCDs and DVDs. But a violent campaign by militant Taleban has caused this business to decline across large parts of NWFP. Hundreds of video outlets have been blown up. Others have voluntarily closed down or switched to other businesses." (BBC News (6 December 2007) *Pakistan dancing girls fear Taleban*)

An *Inter Press Service* report on the treatment of artistes by the Taliban states:

"The Taliban brazenly killed a traditional female dancer, Shabana, in violence-wracked Swat district, in the NWFP, on Dec. 22 Her body was left hanging from an electric pole; the ground littered with CDs of her music, money and pictures from her albums -- seemingly as a warning to others not to defy the Taliban ban on 'un-Islamic vices'. As the Pakistani Taliban assert control over swathes of the NWFP and bordering tribal areas, they have cracked down on shops selling music and films, stopped barbers from shaving beards, and closed down girls' schools. Some 300 schools, the majority girls' schools, have been burnt in Swat. Also, all the CD and music shops have closed down. 'Taliban consider music, art, songs, dance and drama as un-Islamic, and those involved face the music. Artistes face execution or kidnapping,' says academic Ashraf Ali of Peshawar University who is an expert on the Taliban." (Inter Press Service (26 January 2009) *Culture-Pakistan: Artistes Caught in Crossfire*)

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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