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**Information on the Taliban cracking down on certain types of business activity. In particular, any examples of people engaged in the retail of CDs/DVDs being attacked/threatened/forced to abandon their business by the Taliban.**

*A Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty article 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 2008) *Pakistan: Worries in Pakistan that Taliban imposing 'parallel' government*)

In regard to the Swat region specifically, it states:

"Afrasiab Khattak is an ethnic-Pashtun politician currently serving as a peace envoy for the frontier province government. He tells RFE/RL the Taliban is entrenched in parts of the tribal areas and is using the threat of its military

strength to raise taxes, amend educational norms, and establish its own Islamic court and prison systems.

"In fact, a parallel system [of government] already exists," Khattak says. "Its center is located in the Waziristan [tribal district]. And it has now expanded into all the tribal regions. Swat is its most successful example in the settled [or regularly administered] areas [of NWFP]. But such activities are spreading to [the districts of] Bannu, Hangu, and elsewhere."

In late December, a local Taliban shura, or council, imposed a complete ban on education for girls living in Swat, a northern NWFP district plagued by insurgency. Following protests from other Taliban factions, the ban was softened to allow girls up to 9 years of age to attend classes in single-sex schools.

But education officials like Babak argue that schools remain a favored target of local Taliban groups. He says the Taliban has used fire and explosives to destroy more than 165 schools and colleges in NWFP -- the majority of them for girls." (ibid)

An *International Crisis Group* report (pp. 13-14) mentions further Taliban activity in Swat:

"On 16 February 2009, NWFP's Awami National Party (ANP)-led government and the TNSM reached an agreement, devised by the military, for the imposition of Sharia in NWFP's Malakand region, which includes Swat..... In return, the TNSM will ensure that the Pakistani Taliban in Swat lay down heavy weapons, end its armed campaign and accept the government's writ in Swat." (International Crisis Group (13 March 2009) *Pakistan: The Militant Jihadi Challenge*)

It continues:

"On 4 March, the NWFP government agreed to an additional 17-point plan to enforce Sharia in Swat, which included measures against obscenity and corruption, closing down music shops and expelling "prostitutes" and "pimps" from Swat. This new agreement, noted a national daily, "virtually amounts to handing over charge of Swat to the Taliban and allowing them to determine arbitrarily the distinction between vice and virtue and impose their own values through an extrajudicial system of vigilantes" (ibid)

Following this agreement *BBC News* reports on conditions in the Swat including a conflict map illustrating the degree of Taliban influence in various regions of the North Western Frontier Province (NWFP):

"By early April 2009, Sharia law had been imposed as part of a deal between the authorities and the local Taliban. However, the militants failed to disarm completely in line with the accord and their fighters spread to neighbouring districts, prompting international concern. An army offensive was launched in Swat in early May. The main city, Mingora, was retaken later that month.

The local Taliban, under their leader Maulana Fuzlullah, extended their control throughout Swat, especially in areas of policing and its judicial system.

Maulana Fazlullah is the son-in-law of radical cleric Sufi Mohammad who led an insurgency in the 1990s. Sufi Mohammad brokered the failed peace deal in Swat. (BBC News (22 June 2009) *Pakistan conflict map*)

General reports from Taliban controlled border regions in relation to entertainment are found in the *Guardian*:

“Zakir, a 22-year-old computer store clerk, said his village, Swari, was straining under food shortages and a 24-hour curfew. But life under the Taliban had been worse, he said.

After seizing control last month, militants had robbed two banks, closed barber shops, banned music and forced people to disable their satellite television receivers, he said.” (Guardian Online (3 May 2009) *Refugees on a wild frontier between army and Taliban*)

The *US Department of State* records:

“Throughout the reporting period, attacks, threats, and violence by Islamic extremists increased across the country, but especially in the NWFP. The origin was perceived to be from the influence of the Taliban coming across the border from neighboring Afghanistan.

On June 29, 2008, Tehrik-i-Taliban posted notices on mosques throughout Kohat, NWFP asking persons to refrain from engaging in “un-Islamic” practices of listening to music, watching television, gambling, and shaving beards.” (US Department of State (19 September 2008) *2008 Report on Religious Freedoms – Pakistan*)

It continues:

“Throughout the reporting period, Islamic extremists attacked shops in the NWFP and FATA that sold local and foreign music and video cassettes. Shop owners were warned prior to attacks to stop selling items considered to be un-Islamic. In at least one case, Muslim clerics were arrested for an attack.

In June 2008 four bomb blasts destroyed seven shops in Kohat, NWFP. The blasts also partially damaged a rural health center.

In April 2008, a remote controlled explosive device destroyed a video shop in the Karak District, NWFP. Local police registered a case against the unknown assailants, but no arrests were made.

In April 2008 militants damaged seven classrooms at a girls' school in Dara Adam Khel using an explosive device. A case was registered against the unknown assailants, but no arrests were made.

In January 2008 two music shops in the Afridiabad area of Peshawar were blown up. Police registered cases against the unknown assailants but with no arrests made. (ibid)

And in a *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* article on Peshawar, it is stated:

"Ijaz Khan said the Taliban have gradually increased their influence over the past five years from Waziristan, some 500 kilometers south of Peshawar. He said their influence is now visible, with the militants making sporadic raids into Peshawar in a bid to regulate residents' lives by blowing up DVD shops and targeting those considered un-Islamic." (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (30 June 2008) *Pakistani troops seek to counter Taliban threat to Peshawar*)

Also in Peshawar, another news article states:

"Chilling letters demanding that shop owners shut down their stores began appearing under doors last year, convincing a few businessmen to close shop.

In October (2007), a small explosion ripped through a DVD shop, killing one, injuring 16 and damaging several businesses nearby. The message, shop owners say, was clear: Shut down, or face the consequences." (MySanAntonioNews.com (17 August 2008) *Taliban's campaign of fear drives patrons away from city's shops*)

*The Weekly Standard* also reports:

"The Taliban has conducted a campaign of bombings and intimidation against barber, tailor, video, and CD shops across the province. Today, the Daily Times reports shops in Peshawar are now opening "Islamic businesses" as the police are unable to protect them. The police have actually recommended the shopkeepers close down, and expressed their own fear of the Taliban as well.

The shopkeepers did not give up continuing their business until the local police expressed "helplessness" to protect them against any possible attack from militants. "We went to the local police and they disappointed us by saying that we better close down our business if there was a direct threat," the DVD shop owner told Daily Times. Police, however, cited its problems in protecting the businessmen. "Everyone is seeking protection, but we do not have the required number of policemen to provide it," Nisar Khan, station house officer at the University Town Police Station, told Daily Times." (The Weekly Standard (5 December 2007) *The Taliban move on Peshawar*)

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**(All accessed 23 July 2009)**

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.