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Afghan peace envoy shot dead

Arsala Rahmani, a top member of country's High Peace Council and former Taliban minister, shot in western Kabul.

13 May 2012

A top member of the High Peace Council (HPC) and former Taliban-era official has been shot dead in Afghanistan, according to local authorities.

Arsala Rahmani was killed in western Kabul on Sunday when an unknown attacker in a vehicle shot the former Taliban deputy education minister while on his way to work, said Mohammad Zahir, head of the Kabul police department's criminal investigation division.

"Shortly after leaving home he was hit by a single bullet from a passing car. The bullet passed through his left arm and hit his heart," Mohammad Waris, Rahmani's grandson, told the AFP news agency. "He died in the hospital."

Rahmani was on his way to a meeting with politicians and other officials in a government-run media centre in the heavily barricaded diplomatic centre of Kabul.

"His driver did not immediately realise that Rahmani had been killed," Zahir told the Reuters news agency.

Rahmani's body has been transported to Sardar Dawood Khan hospital in the Afghan capital.

Rahmani was among a group of Taliban-era leaders to accept a reconciliation offer from the government of Hamid Karzai, when he became a close adviser to the Afghan president.

'Tragedy'

Before joining the HPC, the 70-year-old served as a senator appointed by Karzai in 2005 and again in 2010.

Burhanuddin Rabbani, the former head of the HPC, was assassinated on September 20.

Rabbani, a former president, was killed by a suicide bomber posing as a peace emissary from the Taliban.

The High Peace Council was set up by Karzai two years ago to open talks with the Taliban.

On their official Twitter account, the US embassy in Kabul **called the death** of another HPC member a "tragedy".

The International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan (ISAF), released a statement calling Rahmani an "inspiration to us all" for his decision to leave the Taliban and engage with the Afghan government.

"The only possible aim of this attack is to intimidate those, who like Rahmani, want to help make Afghanistan a better place for its citizens and the region", the statement read.

Officials within the Karzai administration have recently said that Taliban willing to negotiate with the Afghan government have been facing serious threats from others within the movement.

Aimal Faizi, spokesman for Karzai, said that most Taliban commanders who spoke of negotiations with the government have either been detained or killed.

Zabiullah Mujahid, spokesman for the Taliban, has denied the group's involvement, saying "we are still committed to our campaign against the so-called members of the so-called High Peace Council, but again I insist that the Taliban were not behind today's assassination", referring to a statement issued earlier this month that members of the council and other officials in Afghanistan will be targeted as part of the group's spring offensive