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Afghanistan: Spiralling lawlessness highlights need for promised international aid

Amnesty International urgently calls on the donor community to deliver promised funds and honour commitments to assist in the efforts to rebuild Afghanistan.

"As the world shifts its attention away from Afghanistan, the country is descending into a downward spiral of lawlessness and instability" said Amnesty International today.

Since early 2004, at least 29 humanitarian and reconstruction workers have been killed. The recent killings of five Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) staff and eleven Chinese construction workers highlight the lawlessness and lack of security across the country.

There are also high levels of continuing violence against women, attacks by armed groups and discrimination on grounds of gender, ethnicity and religion. Institutions for the protection of human rights and implementation of rule of law remain weak. A climate of impunity prevails. It is not clear that enough is being done in order to instil confidence and bring security and peace to a country wracked by nearly three decades of war.

"Unless the spiralling lawlessness is stopped, Afghanistan risks collapsing into outright conflict" warned Amnesty International.

Allegations of human rights violations, including torture and ill-treatment by the US military in US-managed detention facilities have been received by Amnesty International. Such actions undermine the rule of law and are contrary to international humanitarian and human rights law. They are also damaging to efforts to rebuild Afghanistan.

At a donor meeting in Berlin, the US Secretary of State Colin Powell said that the conference showed a commitment by the international community to Afghanistan's future and "that the United States views this as a priority mission for us. NATO views it as their number one operational mission. The international community knows its obligations and we will meet those obligations". Amnesty International urges the US and other donors to stand by these commitments.

The Afghan government must in turn deliver on its responsibilities to protect and promote the human rights of its citizens by reinforcing and supporting efforts to investigate and bring to trial the perpetrators responsible for the deaths of Afghan and international humanitarian workers. This must go hand in hand with efforts to establish an independent and impartial criminal justice system and implement an official moratorium on all executions.

Given the seriousness of the security situation, it is alarming that neighbouring and non-neighbouring countries persist in promoting the return of refugees and asylum seekers to Afghanistan instead of providing protection. An urgent need to explore all possible avenues, including resettlement and local integration where appropriate, must be considered.

Background

The Tokyo and Berlin donor meetings, in 2002 and 2004 respectively, promised hope to the Afghan people. Over US\$8 billion was pledged primarily to re-establish the rule of law including through rebuilding a functioning criminal justice system, accelerating the disarmament process, demobilising and reintegrating armed groups and promoting women's rights. However, pledges for funds have not been fully fulfilled and in the meantime the reconstruction process has slowed.

Elections, scheduled for September 2004, are widely regarded as critical to the success of Afghanistan's political reform and long term stability. However, the lack of sufficient funds and growing insecurity risks are undermining the process of free and fair elections. Continuing impunity for individuals who are alleged to have committed gross human rights violations in the past and who are now standing for elections also risks severely damaging the legitimacy of the elections.