
amnesty international

AFGHANISTAN Caught in the cross-fire

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In the context of escalating hostilities, Amnesty International is deeply concerned about the safety and security of civilians in Afghanistan particularly in and around Kabul. The organization fears that civilians continue to be at risk of deliberate or indiscriminate killing during the fighting between the Taleban and their opponents and of other serious human rights abuses at the hands of armed groups. Amnesty International is once again urging the Taleban and all other warring factions in Afghanistan to desist from such abuses, to abide by the basic humanitarian principles contained in the laws of armed conflict and to refrain from targeting civilian centres. Amnesty International is also urging the governments of the world to make concerted efforts for the protection of civilians against human rights abuses, particularly vulnerable groups such as women and children.

Regional powers especially have a responsibility to ensure that no military equipment or training which would be used to commit human rights violations is supplied to the warring factions.

Amnesty International continues to be concerned about the situation of women in all areas of Afghanistan who have been victims of abuses for many years by armed guards belonging to the warring factions. The international community, through any influence it can exert, must make serious efforts to ensure that women are not treated as spoils of war and subjected to rape and other forms of torture.

Amnesty International believes that the situation of women in areas controlled by the Taleban deserves particular attention. Under the Taleban's code, women are not allowed to work outside homes or to leave their houses without having a reason acceptable to the Taleban. Women defying these orders have been brutally beaten in public by Taleban guards wielding long chains. Women detained or otherwise physically restricted under Taleban codes solely by reason of their gender would be considered prisoners of conscience by Amnesty International.

Concern about the restrictions the Taleban have imposed on the rights of women has also been raised by the United Nations and European Union as well as a number of governments. So far, the Taleban have not made a commitment to reverse these restrictions.

About 1,000 young civilian men taken prisoner by the Taleban in early October continue to be unaccounted for. The Taleban have denied that these men have been detained. However, the men's

families still have no idea of their whereabouts and fear that they may have been taken forcibly to the war front.

Over the years Amnesty International has consistently raised concerns about human rights abuses perpetrated by all parties and armed groups in Afghanistan. The abuses being inflicted by the Taleban represent yet another layer of suffering in the continuum of abuses to which Afghan civilian populations have been subjected over the past 17 years.

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