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AFGHANISTAN: FOREIGN-SPONSORED HUMAN RIGHTS DISASTER IGNORED BY THE WORLD

The international community continues to ignore the human rights disaster in Afghanistan, and those governments which have flooded the country with arms and used the 16-year old conflict for their own political ends hold a grave responsibility, Amnesty International said today as it launched a major campaign.

"Governments that supported different factions and backed them with weapons have helped set the stage for today's catastrophic human rights situation," Amnesty International said. "For this reason, they must play a role in bringing those violations to an end."

In a report released today, the organization details the killings, torture including rape, hostage-taking, and "disappearances" which are continuing on a massive scale in Afghanistan. As well, the organization details how governments eagerly offered political support, supplied arms or facilitated weapons transfers to warring factions in a civil war that began after the Soviet invasion of the country in 1979.

The report names the former Soviet Union, the United States and its Western European allies, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Iran as countries primarily responsible for arming the perpetrators of the current human rights disaster in Afghanistan.

"The human costs of these arms transfers have been borne by millions of defenceless women, men and children who have taken no active part in the hostilities," Amnesty International said.

Military supplies have reportedly continued to enter Afghanistan from India, Iran, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Uzbekistan. Outside powers have maintained links with their favoured armed groups in Afghanistan in a bid to affect political developments in the region.

"In effect, they have facilitated a climate of lawlessness in the country in which human rights are treated with contempt," Amnesty International said.

The organization has made a special plea to these governments as well as to the governments of the United States, the European Union, and the successor states of the Soviet Union to show determination in establishing respect for human rights in Afghanistan.

"All these governments are in a position to effect change. They must act in a concerted manner to save Afghan civilians from mass killings, torture and rape, abduction and cruel punishments such as stoning and amputation," Amnesty International said. "It is now their responsibility to help bring this cycle of abuses to an end."

The organization said it is vital that the respect, protection and promotion of human rights is integral to any settlement of the 16-year-old conflict. As negotiations over a settlement continue the organization urged all sides to seize this opportunity to end the suffering of the Afghan people.

All warring factions carry out attacks against residential areas with utter disregard for the principles of international humanitarian law which govern armed conflict. Since April 1992 when Mujahideen groups seized power, over 25,000 people have been killed in Kabul alone in attacks by rival factions apparently aimed deliberately and arbitrarily against residential areas. Armed guards have continued to attack the homes of defenceless civilians in a rampage of looting, beating and killing unarmed people. Amnesty International has not identified a single case in which an armed guard of any faction has even been disciplined for such abuses.

Thousands of civilians have gone missing after armed political groups detained them. The vast majority of those missing are suspected of supporting a rival faction or associated with previous governments. Many are held in secret or known detention centres and brutally tortured, starved and, in the case of women and young boys and girls, raped or sexually assaulted.

One man arrested in Kabul by members of an armed faction supporting the government in 1994 told Amnesty International of his torture by interrogators working for the Ministry of State Security: "They put one of my testicles between a pair of pliers and crushed it... One day they hit me with a Kalashnikov rifle butt and my skull broke. Electric shocks continued to be given to my hands and feet. I was tortured there for two weeks every other night."

A young woman who lived in the Shahrara district of Kabul in early 1994 was subjected to frequent rape after she left her house to find some food. Two Mujahideen armed guards arrested her in the street and took her to their base in a house where 22 men raped her for three days. She was then allowed to go home where she found her three young children had died of hypothermia.

In much of the country, leaders of armed political groups act as Islamic judges and order punishments such as amputation, stoning and "executions" with no legal safeguards against their arbitrary decisions. Armed guards of the various factions also commit human rights abuses with impunity. All these armed groups have ignored the principles of humanitarian law which require them to safeguard the human rights of Afghan civilians.

Amnesty International said it opposes the transfer of military, security or police equipment when it believes such transfers contribute to human rights abuses. The human rights organization said the governments which extended political, military and material support for more than a decade to all sides in the civil war in pursuit of their own political interests, knew that their allies were committing gross and widespread human rights abuses. None of these arms supplying countries are known to have made sustained efforts to prevent their weapons from being used to perpetrate the abuses.

"If the international community cannot guarantee human rights for Afghanistan's citizens, it should not guarantee weapons and ammunition," said Amnesty International.

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For further information, please refer to Amnesty International's report:
Afghanistan: International Responsibility for Human Rights Disaster (ASA/11/09/95)