

Afghanistan: Uncontrolled flow of arms will lead to more human misery

The unconditional flow of weapons and other military equipment and expertise to the warring parties in Afghanistan will lead to further human rights abuses and war crimes, Amnesty International said today in a briefing on such transfers.

"To date, both the Taleban and the Northern Alliance have been heavily armed by foreign governments regardless of their appalling human rights records," the organization said.

"While the shifting of arms is inevitable in a conflict situation, it is crucial that further transfers of arms and expertise are rigorously controlled."

Amnesty International is calling for independent monitors to be put in place to verify that commanders who have been responsible for gross human rights abuses in the past are removed before any transfers take place. The monitors should remain in place to ensure that the arms and expertise are not used to commit human rights abuses.

During the 1980s and 1990s, arms and related supplies were sent from the USA and some of its West European allies, as well as the former Soviet Union, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Iran, and were used for perpetuating massive human rights abuses by various armed groups in Afghanistan.

Civilians in Afghanistan are suffering the legacy of these uncontrolled transfers, thousands have died from anti-personnel landmines alone.

Since 1994, the main supplies of arms and related items to the Taliban have come from official stocks in Pakistan or from Chinese or other sales through private dealers based in Pakistan and with private funding from Saudi Arabia.

Recent supplies to the Northern Alliance have been reportedly sent from Iran and the Russian Federation via the Central Asian states, especially Tajikistan, as well as from the Slovak Republic, although the Central Asian states have denied their involvement.

Amnesty International is concerned that the Russian government is reportedly planning deliveries of up to \$45 million worth of arms to the Northern Alliance which are not conditioned to any human rights criteria. Furthermore the US Congress is currently considering a law to provide up to \$300 million of direct military assistance to "eligible Afghan resistance organizations".

Amnesty International also urges all governments to refrain from the use of cluster bombs near civilian areas, from using depleted uranium weapons whose effects are not fully known, and to refrain from providing such weapons to any of those involved in the conflict.

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