

Civilians under threat in Afghanistan

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Civilians are bearing the brunt of the conflict in Afghanistan, with local people caught up in the fighting between the Taliban, Afghan, US and NATO Forces. Suicide attacks, roadside bombs and other forms of violence pose a daily threat to the people in the conflict-ridden parts of the country.

The Taliban's military rulebook, or *Laheya*, explicitly sanctions the killing of teachers. If a teacher ignores a warning from the Taliban to stop teaching, he must be beaten. If he continues to teach "contrary to the principles of Islam", he must be killed. A Taliban *fatwa* orders the death of anyone who supports the US-led intervention.

Scores of civilians have been deliberately killed by Taliban insurgents in the past two years after being branded "spies". Targets include election candidates, clerics, government and health workers and teachers. In April, three men were publicly hanged by the Taliban in the southern province of Helmand after being accused of spying for international troops.

The Taliban failed to distinguish between civilians and military targets in suicide attacks and attacks using improvised explosive devices such as roadside bombs. At least 756 civilians - including many children - were killed in 2006 in such attacks, according to UN and NATO figures.

The Taliban's stance towards civilians is inconsistent -- and far removed from its obligations under international law. A Taliban spokesperson told Amnesty International that attacking "unarmed" civilians was "forbidden". But he added that: "There is no difference between the armed people who are fighting against us and civilians who are co-operating with foreigners".

By deliberately targeting civilian workers, the Taliban are committing war crimes - and some of these crimes constitute crimes against humanity.

The Taliban must comply with the rules of international humanitarian law, to which they are bound. They must end indiscriminate attacks, such as suicide attacks in public places, and stop deliberately targeting civilians working for the government or with foreign organisations.

Read the full report:

All who are not friends, are enemies: Taliban abuses against civilians