

AI Index: PRE 01/191/2010
12 June 2010

Kyrgyz government must protect its population

Amnesty International urges the Kyrgyzstani interim government and local authorities to ensure adequate protection for all Kyrgyzstani citizens and in particular those of Uzbek origin who have been targeted during the violence in the southern part of the country.

This appeal was issued as violence escalated in the southern city of Osh and the surrounding area.

“The Kyrgyzstani law enforcement is failing to effectively provide human security to its population, in particular to the Uzbek community,” said Maisy Weicherding, Amnesty International’s expert on Central Asia.

“Immediate action is needed to prevent a further deterioration of the situation. The security forces, in their attempts to restore law and order in the city of Osh and the surrounding areas, must respect fundamental human rights.”

The clashes in Osh and the surrounding area have had a considerable impact on the Uzbek community. Thousands of people, mainly women, children and elderly people, have fled the city out of fear of more attacks. Between 2,000 and 6,000 were reported to have made their way to the nearby border with neighbouring Uzbekistan to cross into safety. Amnesty International fears that more people will be displaced, as the situation escalates.

Eyewitnesses have reported that groups of armed civilians, mostly young men claiming to be Kyrgyz, were roaming the streets of Osh, targeting districts of the city inhabited mainly by Uzbeks shooting at civilians, setting shops and houses on fire and looting private property. While official figures for the past two days of violence speak about more than 60 people killed, unconfirmed reports given to the independent Ferghana.ru news agency by local district council representatives in Osh said that at least 500 Uzbek civilians had been killed by midday on 12 June and over 2,000 had been injured, many seriously.

Local law enforcement sources in Osh reportedly told journalists that they were unable to control the situation and protect the civilian population. In some instances armed men were said to have overwhelmed security forces and hijacked armoured vehicles. Some district council representatives also reported snipers firing at civilians.

The unrest has already spread to the city of Jalal-Abad and other towns and villages in the surrounding areas where a state of emergency has also been declared.

“With thousands of people on the move seeking safety, the authorities of neighbouring countries, and of Uzbekistan in particular, must keep their borders open and allow entry to all those fleeing the escalating

violence in Kyrgyzstan, regardless of their ethnic origin and offer them protection until security is restored in Kyrgyzstan,” Maisy Weicherding said.

Background

The deadly violence is said to have started with clashes between rival gangs of mostly Kyrgyz and Uzbek youths on 10 June which quickly escalated into large-scale arson, looting and violent attacks on mainly Uzbek-populated districts in Osh, including killings.

The south of Kyrgyzstan is home to a large ethnic Uzbek community and was the power base of former president Kurmanbek Bakiev, who was overthrown in April after a violent confrontation between government and opposition supporters over increases in energy prices and corruption.

The appointed head of interim government, Roza Otunbaeva, had claimed in April that the interim government – set to remain in power until elections are held in October – was fully in control of the country and had dissolved parliament and appointed new ministers.

While the cause of the clashes is unclear the interim government and other observers have blamed the violence on supporters of former President Kurmanbek Bakiev and the intent of criminal groups to destabilize the situation in the country ahead of the constitutional referendum on 27 June. Parliamentary elections are scheduled for 4 October.