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Amnesty International urges Bush administration to maintain human rights standards in response to 11 September attacks, and warns of looming humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan.

Amnesty International called on US President George W. Bush to uphold the highest international human rights standards in his administration's response to the horrific acts of September 11. The organization also called on the international community to address the unfolding humanitarian crisis on Afghanistan's borders.

In a letter to President Bush, Irene Khan, Secretary General of Amnesty International, reiterated the organization's condemnation of the attacks and said, "As with all victims of violent crime, human rights violations and abuses, the suffering of victims, survivors and the bereaved demands compassion and justice. We urge you to lead your government to take every necessary human rights precaution in the pursuit of justice, rather than revenge, for the victims of this terrible crime."

Irene Khan also urged the President to ensure "that anger does not give way to retaliatory injustices." Amnesty International noted President Bush's remarks in support of Muslim American and other vulnerable communities and strongly condemned attacks incited by identity-based discrimination.

Amnesty International has urged the Bush Administration and the United Nations Security Council to use all appropriate means to bring those responsible for the September 11 attacks to justice "within the framework of a fair and accountable criminal justice system, and with full respect for international standards for a fair trial."

The organization also urged the Administration to "fully explore every measure possible to bring the perpetrators to justice before resorting to armed intervention."

In the event of armed intervention, Amnesty International urged all parties to conduct operations in a manner that upholds at all times the highest standards of human rights and humanitarian law. "This includes taking all precautions to spare civilians, and in particular avoiding direct attacks on civilian or civilian objects, indiscriminate attacks and attacks on military targets that have a disproportionate impact on civilians," Irene Khan wrote.

The organization asked for clarification on public statements by administration officials suggesting that the 1976 ban on US participation in assassinations may be rescinded. Amnesty International also expressed concern about certain counter-terrorism measures being considered by the US Congress, in particular, indefinite detention without evidence or judicial review of individuals suspected as terrorists. Irene Khan noted that the practices are contrary to international human rights standards.

Amnesty International also called for the international community to address the brewing humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, as several hundred thousand people are trying to flee the country, fearing imminent attack. With all surrounding borders sealed, Amnesty International has called for Pakistan, Iran and Tajikistan to open their borders to refugees from Afghanistan. This exodus adds to the 1.1 million Afghans already internally displaced due to drought, armed conflict and food shortages and the approximate two million Afghan refugees in Pakistan.

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BY FAX Ref.: TG AMR 51/2001.68
George W. Bush
The President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20500, USA 21 September 2001

Dear Mr President

I write to express Amnesty International's deepest sympathy following the attacks of 11 September which resulted in the deaths of thousands of people of many different nationalities. We reiterate our condemnation of this appalling crime and our support for efforts to bring the perpetrators to justice in accordance with international human rights standards.

In the wake of a crime of such magnitude, principled leadership becomes crucial to ensure that anger does not give way to retaliatory injustices. In this regard, Amnesty International welcomes your statements voicing solidarity and support for Muslim American and other vulnerable communities across the USA and disgust at the intimidation of members of such communities by fellow citizens.

Amnesty International remains concerned at the continuing threats and attacks across the United States against individuals and communities perceived or known to be Muslim or from the Middle East. We welcome reports that the Federal Bureau of Investigation has begun to look into these cases. We urge you to continue, at every opportunity, to denounce such violence and threats of violence. We also urge your administration to do all in its power and influence to ensure that state and local government leaders and law enforcement officials themselves repeat that same message in their own jurisdictions, in the strongest possible terms, and to make it clear that such crimes of hate and discrimination will not be tolerated.

Just as you have sought to turn the citizens of your country away from acts of retaliation against those whom they perceive, by their religion, race or appearance, to be associated with those who perpetrated the 11 September attacks, we urge you to lead your government to take every necessary human rights precaution in the pursuit of justice, rather than revenge, for the victims of this terrible crime.

In your address to Congress on 20 September, you stated that the US Government will use every means of diplomacy, every tool of intelligence, every instrument of law enforcement, every financial influence and every necessary weapon of war, to the disruption and defeat of the global terror network. Amnesty International believes that in any action taken, it is vital to maintain the highest respect for human rights and international human rights standards.

This should include using every means available to bring those responsible for the 11 September attacks to justice within the framework of a fair and accountable criminal justice system, and with full respect for international standards for a fair trial. We urge your administration to adhere to such standards every step of the way towards the objective of justice, and to reject any resort to the death penalty in pursuit of this goal.

Amnesty International is concerned by certain public statements suggesting that the US Government may be contemplating rescinding the 1976 executive order prohibiting US participation in assassinations, and we would welcome an urgent clarification of your government's position on this issue. We are concerned that such a move would amount to an endorsement of extrajudicial executions, thereby violating fundamental principles of international law. We note that in recent months your administration has spoken out against the use of just such a policy by the government of Israel.

Amnesty International is aware that a range of counter-terrorism measures are currently under consideration by Congress, and that your administration has already taken certain steps without Congressional action. For example to extend the length of time for which suspects can be detained. We recognize that governments have the right - indeed, the obligation - to adopt security measures to ensure the safety of their citizens. However, we would urge your administration, including through the newly created Office of

Homeland Security, to ensure that any such measures be implemented in ways that do not undermine fundamental human rights safeguards and standards. We are particularly concerned by a proposal which would allow the Attorney General to identify someone as a Terrorist@ without presenting evidence, and to detain that individual indefinitely pending deportation, without any judicial review of the detention. Such a measure would be contrary to international human rights standards.

As you have noted, the response to the 11 September attacks is not just a US concern, but a global one. Amnesty International has written to the UN Security Council urging it to ensure that in the search for justice, states fully explore every measure possible to bring the perpetrators to justice before resorting to armed intervention.

However, should military action take place, Amnesty International urges all parties to take all necessary measures to ensure that operations are conducted in such a way as to uphold at all times the highest standards of human rights and humanitarian law. This includes taking all precautions to spare civilians, and in particular avoiding direct attacks on civilian or civilian objects, indiscriminate attacks and attacks on military targets that have a disproportionate impact on civilians. We are gravely concerned that fear of military attacks on Afghanistan has already caused a mass movement of people towards borders, an unfolding humanitarian crisis which must also be taken into urgent account.

In conclusion, we would once again wish to express our sympathy to those who lost loved ones in the 11 September attacks. As with all victims of violent crime, human rights violations and abuses, the suffering of victims, survivors and the bereaved demands compassion and justice. With this in mind, we hope that you will receive this letter in the spirit in which it is written, that is, out of a concern to ensure continuing respect for international human rights standards, which can so easily be threatened at a time such as this.

Yours sincerely

Irene Khan
Secretary General