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Afghanistan: International actors have a special responsibility for ending the human rights catastrophe

Twenty years on from the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, all states that have armed, trained and financed warring factions in Afghanistan have a special responsibility for ending the human rights catastrophe in that country, Amnesty International said today.

In a series of new reports and a special campaign to mark the anniversary, the human rights organisation highlights changing patterns of human rights abuses in the war-torn country and calls for decisive action to reverse international neglect of this deteriorating situation.

“It will be 20 years next month since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and this country’s descent into civil war,” Amnesty International said. “For two decades, the international community has mostly averted its eyes from the human rights catastrophe in Afghanistan. It must now act to end it.”

“The United States, its West European allies and the countries of the former Soviet Union have failed to bring to an end the very human rights crisis that they helped to create,” the organisation added.

“Pakistan, Iran and other countries that are reportedly supporting the warring factions in their military campaigns must now use their influence on armed groups to ensure that they respect human rights.”

A new pattern in Afghanistan’s human rights tragedy is the targeting of people on the basis of their group identity -- as women, children, ethnic minorities and defenders of human rights.

Ethnic tensions were not a driving force during the earlier stages of the civil war, but this is now changing, the Amnesty International reports point out.

The Taleban, a largely Pushtun movement, is targeting minorities such as Tajiks and Hazaras while some non-Pushtun forces have targeted Pushtuns.*

“Defenceless Afghan citizens in minority-populated areas have seen their fathers, sons, friends and neighbours massacred before their eyes or hauled away by armed groups,” Amnesty International said.

“Survivors have witnessed the destruction of their crops, livestock, orchards and irrigation systems and have been forced to flee their homes.”

This summer, tens of thousands of Tajiks in the Shamli valley, north of Kabul, were driven from their homes and became refugees in their own country, without adequate food or shelter.

While calling for international action to put a stop to these atrocities, Amnesty International is also urging armed groups in the country to end their catalogue of human rights abuses.

“For too long, they have used civilians as pawns in their war games,” the organisation said.

Amnesty International also called for urgent action to :

restore the rights of Afghan women, who have become victims of power struggles between men, and continue to be subjected to harsh laws that do not allow them to move around freely, go to school or work;

address the plight of Afghanistan’s children, who have been abducted, raped, forced into prostitution and used as hostages by armed groups;

ensure protection for the “world’s largest refugee group” of over two million Afghans in neighbouring Iran and Pakistan, who have few rights. They are increasingly being resented in host countries and are vulnerable to the activities of armed Afghan groups.

***Note to editors:**

Pushtuns are the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan, forming a majority in the south and the east of the country, and a minority in other areas. Tajiks are the second largest ethnic group. Hazaras, the third largest group, are mostly composed of Shi’a Muslims, unlike the other two groups, whose members are Sunnis.

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