

EXTERNAL

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EXTRA 110/95

Fear for safety

22 September 1995

AFGHANISTAN

Civilians in Kabul

The Taleban, an armed opposition group in Afghanistan have threatened a bombardment of Kabul if the forces of Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani do not surrender by 24 September. On 20 September, Agence France-Presse quoted Mullah Mishr, the Taleban frontline commander based in the provincial capital Maidan Shahr, south-west of Kabul, as saying: "We have given them a five-day ultimatum, starting from today,"

Earlier, on 15 September, the Pakistani newspaper, *The News*, reported that the Taleban had threatened to attack the Afghan capital if President Rabbani does not step down. It quoted a Taleban spokesman as saying that diplomats, members of humanitarian organizations and all foreigners should leave Kabul or take shelter in safe locations.

Amnesty International is appealing to the Taleban leaders to ensure the safety of the civilian population of Kabul and, in particular, to ensure that their armed forces refrain from deliberate or indiscriminate attacks, which includes shelling, on civilians. Amnesty International further urges the Taleban leaders to respect the principle of humanitarian law that are designed to ensure the protection of civilians and non-combatants in situations of armed conflict.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Continued hostilities have resulted in catastrophic human rights abuses inside Afghanistan. All warring factions have carried out attacks against residential areas with disregard for the principles of international humanitarian law. The factions have usually justified targeting civilians in residential areas by saying that the people living there have supported a rival group. Tens of thousands of people have been killed in various parts of the country by the bombs dropped and rockets launched deliberately or indiscriminately against their homes, schools, hospitals or even places where they have sought shelter from such attacks. The vast majority of the victims have been non-combatant Kabul residents.

Previous attacks against Kabul stopped when the Taleban forces entered and subsequently retreated from western Kabul and its surrounding areas about five months ago. The relative calm allowed humanitarian organizations to set up operations in the capital.

With the threat of a renewed attack against the city, once again fear of a repetition of the daily bombing of Kabul which started in January 1994 and lasted for over a year, leaving tens of thousands of people dead and hundreds of thousands homeless has made the protection of unarmed civilians a prime human rights concern.

The 600,000 remaining inhabitants of Kabul will find difficulty to seek shelter from a renewed attack, and since few places in Kabul have been immune from deliberate or indiscriminate attacks in the past, Kabul's non-combatant residents are once again at risk of becoming the targets.

It is difficult to see how non-combatant residents of this battered city can find safety in another location. To leave Kabul, they will have to cross numerous check-points manned by the armed guards of the various factions who continue

to subject people crossing their territory to various human rights abuses as documented by Amnesty International over the past few years. Even if they do make their way out of Kabul, there are not many safe places for them to go to. Borders between Afghanistan and Iran are sealed, severe restrictions are imposed on the arrival of Afghan refugees to Pakistan, and the conditions under which the displaced Afghans live are often degrading and inhuman.

Amnesty international has over the years appealed to successive governments and armed opposition groups in Afghanistan to ensure that their forces do not commit human rights abuses. Amnesty International's appeals to the armed political groups, including the Taleban, are purely humanitarian in nature regardless of whether or not these groups have received international recognition.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/express/airmail letters in English or your own language:

- appealing to the Taleban leaders to ensure the safety of the civilian population in Kabul and in particular to ensure that their armed forces refrain from deliberate or indiscriminate attacks, which includes shelling, on civilians.
- urging the Taleban leaders to respect the principles of humanitarian law that are designed to ensure the protection of civilians and non-combatants in situations of armed conflict.
- pointing out that in the past Amnesty International has made similar appeals to the governments in Afghanistan as well as to the armed political groups.

APPEALS TO:

Moulavi Abdul Rahman Zaheb
Office of the Taleban
Darul-Uloom Zia-ul Madares
Jamrood Road
Board
Peshawar
Pakistan

Telegrams: Taleban Office, Peshawar, Pakistan

Salutation: Dear Moulavi

Please give your section's address for responses (not your home address).

Sections are requested to send copies of this UA to their home governments. Please request them to use their influence with countries which have links with Afghanistan, including Pakistan, Iran, and Saudi Arabia, to ensure the safety of the civilian population in Kabul.

COPIES TO: Pakistan's diplomatic mission in your country requesting them to forward that to the Taleban leaders in Pakistan.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 26 October 1995.