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NEWS SERVICE ITEMS: EXTERNAL - **AFGHANISTAN** (this is the background information paper which can be used to accompany the news release sent out in News Service 279/94)

INTERNATIONAL NEWS RELEASES

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EMBARGOED FOR 15 DECEMBER 1994

AFGHANISTAN: BACKGROUND INFORMATION TO NEWS RELEASE

The following stories are based on interviews, conducted last month by an Amnesty International delegate, with Afghan refugees in border areas of Pakistan. They can be used as background to the news release on Afghanistan embargoed for 15 December 1994.

Journalists reporting on human rights violations

Armed groups attack and arrest journalists who report incidents of human rights violations.

In January this year, an Afghan journalist was reportedly arrested and beaten repeatedly with a rifle butt by members of Hezb-e Wahdat, a Shia political party allied to the forces of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. They accused her of wanting to send information to the enemy and told her she would only be released if she slept with six armed guards. She was released reportedly after a large sum of money was given to the guards.

Armed guards raiding houses

A woman whose family home had been raided by Mujahideen guards in the western province of Farah in June this year told Amnesty International's delegate how her husband was beaten in front of her and the children:

"They kept beating him violently, saying he had been teaching girls at the village school. We all shouted for mercy but they did not stop. They then stood him in front of me and my four small children. One of them aimed a Kalashnikoff at his heart and shot him dead. He then said he was going to stay in the house and marry me. The next day, I talked to my mother-in-law, and we decided to flee. We had no money so we had to walk most of the way from Farah. It was very difficult with four small children. At every checkpoint, they asked us for money. My mother-in-law cried and begged them to let us go. At the Pakistan border we were asked for money again and it took us several days to find a way to enter Pakistan."

Arbitrary beatings and killings by armed political groups

Mujahideen guards controlling check posts between Kabul and Pakistan reportedly subject people travelling to Kabul to beatings and arbitrary killings if they cannot pay them money. Mujahideen forces surrounding Kabul fire rockets at residential areas in the city, reportedly killing and injuring dozens of people almost daily.

New methods of torture

Some former detainees claimed they had been forced to eat what they were told was human flesh. In one instance in early 1993, a taxi driver with a woman passenger was stopped by armed guards:

"We were stopped in the Kuta Sangi area of Kabul which is controlled by Hezb-e Wahdat. There were several guards there. As with other guards, they had covered their mouths so you could not recognize them. They took us to a house which they used as their base. They gave me a paper to write on it that I had sold my car to them. I refused, and they threatened me saying that they would force me to eat human flesh. They then began to beat me. I signed the paper, but they did not let us go. They then brought some cooked meat and forced us to eat. I ate a small piece and felt sick. They then gave me another paper on which they had written that the woman passenger was my sister, and that I would be selling her for a few Afghanis [Afghan currency] to them. I said I would not do that even if I am killed. They beat me for sometime until their commander told them to stop. They told us to go. As we were walking down the stairs, I heard a noise from behind. I turned back and noticed that the woman was not there. I was ordered to go, otherwise I would be killed."

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