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Public Statement

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Afghanistan / Pakistan: Afghan government investigation into killings in Spin Boldak region must be independent and transparent

Amnesty International welcomes the announcement by the governor of the Afghan province of Kandahar, Assadullah Khaled, that he will be sending a special team to the Spin Boldak area to investigate the killing on 21 March of around 17 individuals, including Pakistani nationals, and that wrongdoing by security forces will be punished. Some reports indicate that the 17 were killed by Afghan security forces while others cite a tribal dispute as being the source of the conflict.

According to press reports, an Afghan security official announced on 22 March that Afghan forces had killed 17 armed individuals some eight kilometres east of Spin Boldak, near the border with Pakistan. Afghan security officials reportedly initially identified the individuals as members of the Taliban who had entered Afghanistan from Pakistan. Pakistani government officials later rejected allegations that those killed were members of the Taliban and stated that they were unarmed members of a tribe with Pakistani nationality travelling to Mazar-e Sharif in northern Afghanistan where they intended to celebrate the *Norouz*, or New Year festival. According to press reports on 22 March, four individuals from the group were not killed in the clashes and returned to Pakistan.

The organisation urges the government of Afghanistan to ensure that the members and leadership of the investigative team are independent -- not party to any aspect of the incident -- and its terms of reference include the ability to summon witnesses in order to establish the facts.

The team should ensure that it is able to provide factual material to prosecutors, including regarding security officials accused of excessive use of force or any other violation. The team should make its findings available to all relevant parties, including to the families of those killed, the two governments concerned and the public.

Anyone suspected of acting unlawfully should be brought to justice, in proceedings which meet international standards of fairness. Redress should be provided to the families of those killed unlawfully.

There is an urgent need to clarify the fate of those who may still be missing following this incident. Amnesty International urges both the investigating team and the two governments to cooperate in order to ensure that families are informed as speedily as possible regarding the fate of their family members.

