

AI INDEX: ASA 11/03/96  
22 JULY 1996.

AFGHANISTAN: INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY SHOULD DO MORE TO RESOLVE  
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The international community should redouble its efforts to find a solution to Afghanistan's human rights catastrophe for which it bears a heavy responsibility, Amnesty International said today following its first visit to the country in 14 years.

"The international community should immediately end its supply of arms which have directly contributed to human rights abuses on such a massive scale," the human rights organization said.

At a press conference in Peshawar, Pakistan, yesterday the Amnesty International team raised its grave concerns about the human rights consequences of the armed conflict which has wrecked Afghanistan, particularly the indiscriminate killing of civilians during rocket and artillery attacks on residential areas. It restated its call on all parties to refrain from such tactics, which are in clear breach of international humanitarian law.

The Amnesty International delegation visited Kabul from 13 to 15 July and Mazar-i-Sharif from 18 to 20 July. The delegation included Amnesty International's Asia director Rory Mungoven, Afghanistan researcher Abbas Faiz and legal expert Karima Bennoune.

Its objective was to open lines of communication with the government and other authorities and to lay the basis for further research and dialogue on its serious concerns in the country. The organisation plans to return regularly to the country and will seek access to other areas, including those controlled by the Taleban.

In Kabul the delegates held discussions with the Interior Minister, Foreign Minister, Chief Justice and saranwalis. In the northern areas they met with General Dostam, chief commander of police, head of the security committee, deputy head of national security, judges and saranwali, and members of the newly formed local Human Rights Committee.

The delegation discussed with the authorities the need for human rights protection in areas under their control. The team outlined the organisation's general concerns about the detention of prisoners of conscience and other political prisoners, torture including rape and the death penalty.

The delegation stressed that it was not in a position to draw firm conclusions against the backdrop of changing political alignments in Afghanistan. It expressed concern, however, about rocket attacks by Taleban forces on residential areas of Kabul which continue on an almost daily basis. The team met with families in Peshawar and Mazar-i-Sharif who had fled such indiscriminate attacks. The delegation received extremely disturbing reports of extensive executions in Taleban areas, including those of 30 young men in Herat in one day in mid-July

The Amnesty International team also found that Afghan intellectuals, human rights defenders and women's groups continued to face intimidation and violence from armed political groups even outside Afghanistan.

Amnesty International hopes that the United Nations (UN) diplomacy will enter a more active and creative phase. The organization will be writing to Dr Holl, the newly-appointed head of the UN

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special mission in Afghanistan, urging him particularly to incorporate human rights issues into his broader political strategy.

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