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AFGHANISTAN: INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY SHOULD ACT NOW TO
PREVENT POSSIBLE BLOODBATH

In the face of yet another round of rocket attacks by the Taleban on civilian areas of Kabul, Amnesty International is urgently calling on the Taleban leadership to abide by the rules of war and immediately stop indiscriminate attacks on the city.

During yesterday's attacks on various parts of Kabul, at least nine people were killed and more than a dozen were injured.

"Time and time again the warring factions have shown a complete disregard for the lives of civilians and it appears that the people of Kabul are now in danger of an imminent bloodbath," Amnesty International said today.

"How many more civilians must be slaughtered before the international community takes decisive action to stop it?"

As the Taleban are apparently preparing for an all-out assault on Kabul, Amnesty International is deeply concerned for the safety and security of all civilian inhabitants. The organization strongly supports the call by Dr Norbert Holl, head of United Nations (UN) special mission to Afghanistan, for the protection of civilian lives.

Over the past four years the human costs of factional fighting backed by regional powers with vested interests in Afghanistan have been borne by millions of defenceless women, men and children who have taken no active part in the hostilities. They have seen faction after faction intent on capturing the city by force attacking their homes, schools, hospitals, vegetable markets and streets.

Armed political groups in Kabul have killed more than 25,000 people since April 1992 when the former government of President Najibullah fell and the city became a battlefield for rival factional fighting. It is now controlled by President Rabbani's forces and is under attack from the Taleban.

Amnesty International, which carried out a mission to Afghanistan last July, believes that unless there are concerted efforts by the international community to save civilian lives in Kabul, thousands of innocent people are likely to become targets of indiscriminate or deliberate killings during the impending fighting between the Taleban and President Rabbani's force. Regional powers especially have a responsibility to ensure that no military equipment or training is supplied to the warring factions as these have been used to kill innocent people.

Calls to spare civilians have also come from other international bodies. Dr Holl has several times warned that Afghan civilians have already suffered enough from years of bloodshed and has urged the warring factions to spare civilian lives by observing a cease-fire. The UN Security Council has also expressed deep concern about the serious humanitarian consequences of the battle of Kabul for the civilian population and has called upon all the parties to stop the fighting immediately. The Taleban and other warring factions have ignored these appeals.

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