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AFGHANISTAN: Executions in PANJSHIR

Amnesty International has condemned the execution of six prisoners in the Afghan province of Panjshir. The human rights organization has urged Ahmad Shah Masood, whose forces control the area, to refrain from ordering the execution of anyone in the territories under his control. The organization also calls on him to ensure that no one in the custody of his personnel is subjected to torture, and to provide detailed information on the trial processes.

The prisoners were arrested on the evening of 4 December hours after a United Front Commander and Governor of Laghman Province, Abdullah Jan Wahedi, was shot dead in an ambush while on his way to the Panjshir valley. Wahedi's five bodyguards and another United Front commando were reportedly wounded in the ambush.

Ahmad Shah Masood's administration has claimed that the prisoners were tried by a court before they were executed. However, it has provided no information about the nature of their trial.

At least one of the prisoners had reportedly been severely tortured : the family of Hemayatollah Hamed Akhundzada claim they saw his nails had been pulled out, and there were signs of violence on the rest of his body when he was being buried. Information on the treatment of the others is not available.

"The circumstances of the men=s alleged trial and their execution raise serious concerns," Amnesty International said.

First, they were executed hastily within 40 hours of their arrest. If a trial did take place in such a short period of time, the prisoners are likely to have been deprived of the right to adequate time and facilities to prepare a defence.

"These rights are fundamental in all trials but in death penalty cases it is especially critical," Amnesty International added.

The Speed and secret nature of the process casts serious doubt on the fairness of any procedures that may have been followed. To the best of Amnesty International's knowledge, the prisoners had no access to the outside world within the 40-hour period of their detention. At the very least, this would have deprived them of the right to produce witnesses in their defence, or to seek the services of a trusted legal counsel, or to appeal against their death sentences or seek commutation.

" We urge the international community to set up an international body with a clearly demonstrated independent, impartial and competent structure to investigate all reports of human rights abuses in Afghanistan with a view to establishing the facts, identifying the perpetrators and recommending means of bringing them to justice." Amnesty International said.

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW web : <http://www.amnesty.org>