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AFGHANISTAN: NO EXCUSES FOR FURTHER BLOODSHED

The capture of Kabul by the Taleban armed group should not lead to further revenge killings, arbitrary punishments or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, Amnesty International said today, following the killing of former president Najibullah.

The organization called on regional governments and the international community to put pressure on all sides in Afghanistan to ensure that human rights are respected in the days following the Taleban's takeover of the capital.

"The manner in which Dr Najibullah was killed defies all norms of international law," Amnesty International said. "These latest events should surely provide the impetus for those governments with influence in the region to stop the massive human rights abuses perpetrated on the Afghan people."

Around five Taleban reportedly entered the United Nations (UN) compound where Dr Najibullah had taken refuge, defying the neutrality of a UN building. They dragged him and his companions out of the compound, and hung their blood-stained bodies from a lamppost in central Kabul.

The Taleban have been responsible for the killing of hundreds of innocent people in indiscriminate rocket attacks against residential areas in and around Kabul. Their leaders have frequently ordered the execution of suspected opponents -- in July this year, 30 young men were executed in Herat in one night. Retreating soldiers, and those who surrendered to the Taleban in Herat last year were also summarily executed.

Civilians in areas already taken over by the Taleban have been denied basic and fundamental human rights. Arbitrary punishment such as stoning and amputations have been introduced, and severe restrictions placed on women. For example women are not allowed to go out to certain places on their own, attend school, or work outside the home.

In a comprehensive report released less than one year ago, Amnesty International revealed a pattern of human rights abuses by all sides in the armed conflict, and appealed to all parties to stop the abuses. Recent events serve to reinforce the organization's appeal to the international community, especially regional powers, to take decisive action to stop the human rights disaster in Afghanistan.

"Regional governments have denied involvement in recent developments in Afghanistan affairs. Nevertheless, it is clear that some governments can, and should, exert influence on the warring factions," Amnesty International said.

"For example, the telephone system in Kandahar and other Taleban-controlled areas are part of the Pakistan telephone exchange system. Surely, if Pakistan and the Taleban can cooperate

2

on strategically important areas such as telecommunications, the Pakistan Government is in a strong position to help promote and protect human rights in Afghanistan.”

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