

## **Afghanistan: Immediate action needed to halt further massacres**

Tens of thousands of ethnic Hazara civilians in the Afghan province of Bamyan are at risk of deliberate and arbitrary killings by advancing Taleban forces, Amnesty International warned today.

The human rights organization called for immediate action to prevent a massacre similar to the deaths of thousands of civilians following the takeover of Mazar-e Sharif on 8 August, and repeated its call for international condemnation of the killings of civilians as well as a group of Iranian diplomats.

“The international community, and in particular foreign governments backing the Taleban, must make it clear that human rights abuses will not be tolerated, Amnesty International said.

“Rather than making the excuse that killings are carried out by soldiers acting of their own accord, the Taleban leadership should be made aware that they are accountable for every case of deliberate killing, torture or other human rights abuse committed by their militia.”

At the time of the takeover of Mazar-e Sharif, Amnesty International warned the international community that it should act to prevent attacks against the Hazara community, as the Taleban have a record of targeting civilians.

Despite this, information given to Amnesty International from victims fleeing the town confirmed that thousands of civilians were killed in their homes, on the streets and at detention camps. Some reports indicate that detainees could also be forcibly engaged in de-mining operations.

The Taleban leadership initially denied Amnesty International’s eyewitness testimony, including reports that 10 Iranian diplomats had been killed by their militia in the Iranian Consulate in Mazar-e Sharif and buried in a nearby mass grave. On 10 September, they admitted that the killings had taken place.

However, the Taleban leadership continues to deny reports given to Amnesty International by eyewitnesses and family members about the massacre of thousands of ethnic Hazara civilians. Foreign governments and the United Nations (UN) have so far confined themselves only to criticising the killings of the diplomats.

“The UN Security Council has issued a statement condemning the killing of the Iranian diplomats and calling for investigations into their deaths, but has remained silent about the deaths and arbitrary detention of thousands of ‘ordinary’ people,” Amnesty International said.

“International pressure has been shown to be effective in revealing the truth about human rights abuses. Public condemnation of these deaths, and a call to bring the perpetrators to account could prevent further massacres in Bamyan.”

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