

News Service: 103/99

AI INDEX: ASA 11/10/99

27 May 1999

## **Afghanistan: Civilians pawns in a game of war they have not chosen**

*Evidence is emerging of the brutal treatment of civilians as territory around the city of Bamiyan has been captured and recaptured by the Taleban and Hezb-e Wahdat factions, Amnesty International reported today.*

*The testimony given just this week to Amnesty International of one family fleeing Yakaolang, typifies the successive waves of abuses committed by the warring factions as they struggle over control of territory.*

***“When the Taleban arrived in Yakaolang [in September 1998], they killed a lot of people... We witnessed two women, two small children and one man, a whole family, being killed in their own orchard house in Girbet...They killed many ordinary people and took away a lot of men whom we cannot trace. We lived in fear all the time.***

***Then, when the area was captured by Hezb-e Wahdat [around 21 April 1999], people were targeted again... We saw a lot of people being beaten brutally. Ordinary people are afraid of all these warring factions. They all terrorise the population when they capture an area. No one can stop them. We just decided to leave.”***

“Civilians are the targets of human right abuses in a war they have not chosen, by one faction after another,” Amnesty International said. “They are pawns in a game of war between armed groups inside Afghanistan backed by different regional powers. Meanwhile, the world has watched massacres of civilians without making any meaningful effort to protect them.”

Prior to the Taleban’s most recent recapture of the city of Bamiyan from the opposition forces on 9 May, the majority of people fled to the surrounding mountains with whatever belongings they could take with them. According to reports received by Amnesty International, many of those who stayed behind were later the targets of systematic killings by the Taleban guards arriving in the city.

Estimates of the alleged killings vary widely but hundreds of men, and in few instances women and children, are reported to have been separated from their families and taken away with no further traces of them. These reports follow a disturbing pattern similar to the abuses committed in the northern city of Mazar-e Sharif in August 1998.

The reports received by Amnesty International state that in addition to killing and detention of civilians, Taleban guards have in the past two months resorted to burning more than

200 village homes in various localities in the Bamiyan province as an act of revenge and retaliation. These reportedly included houses in the villages of Dukani and Haiderabad in May. Homes in villages along the road between Shiber and Bamiyan including Shaspul and Ahangeran are also reported to have been burnt down to the ground in March and April.

The Taleban leader, Mullah Mohammad Omar, has reportedly condemned these house burnings, saying they were in retaliation for earlier house burnings by the anti-Taleban forces. He has made no statement about the alleged massacres.

Amnesty International has also received reports of human rights abuses against the civilian population committed by anti-Taleban forces during the three-week period (21 April and 9 May) which they were in control of Bamyian and surrounding areas. These include severe beating of people suspected of collaborating with the Taleban, arbitrary detention of dozens of civilians, and ill-treatment of their family members.

“These disturbing reports underline the need for action by the international community to ensure protection of civilian population in Afghanistan,” Amnesty International said.

The organization is calling for an international body with a clearly demonstrated independent, impartial and competent structure to be set up to investigate the reports of these recent human rights abuses with a view to establishing the facts, identifying the perpetrators and recommending means of bringing them to justice.

ENDS.../