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AFGHANISTAN

An update on the human rights situation

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Since April 1992 when the Mujahideen forces took control of Kabul and other major cities in Afghanistan, thousands of civilians have become the target of deliberate or indiscriminate attacks on residential areas. Although such killings have been reported from all parts of the country, the vast majority of the victims, more than 25,000, have been killed in Kabul whilst they were walking in the street, in their homes or sheltering in schools or mosques where they thought they would be safe.

Hundreds of men, women and children have been deliberately and arbitrarily killed by members of armed political groups during raids on civilian homes using arms and ammunition supplied by outside powers. All factions in the war have committed rape and other forms of torture. Armed political groups routinely commit acts of torture; the victims are brutally beaten, deprived of food and water, exposed to extremes of hot or cold. Women and girls all over Afghanistan live

in constant fear of being raped by armed guards; rape is apparently condoned by most leaders as a means of terrorizing conquered populations and of rewarding soldiers. Hundreds of thousands of people have been displaced or have fled the country as a result of the civil war to escape the widespread and systematic human rights abuses.

Reports received by Amnesty International indicate that virtually all the armed political groups, as well as the government forces, have been responsible for acts of human rights violations and abuses throughout the country which have been committed with impunity.

Government forces and armed political groups have been responsible for the extrajudicial execution or deliberate and arbitrary killing of thousands of civilians during raids on homes both in Kabul and in other parts of the country. In March this year, following the capture of the Karte Seh district, government forces reportedly carried out indiscriminate artillery attacks and raids on hundreds of civilian homes in Kabul, killing or beating family members, looting property and raping women.

Torture and other forms of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment have been frequently carried out in private jails where civilians are held on suspicion of belonging to a rival political or ethnic group. Former detainees have said that they had been beaten with rifle butts, tied to dead bodies for several days and forced to eat what they were told was human flesh. Female and male detainees, including children and juveniles, have been raped in detention. Scores of detainees have died as a result of such torture.

Thousands of people have reportedly "disappeared" after being abducted by armed guards in all parts of Afghanistan. In the virtual

absence of a judicial system, leaders of armed groups try, convict and sentence prisoners to punishments including executions, stoning to death or whipping. In a few areas Islamic courts are reported to have dispensed summary justice, including public flogging or executions.

Throughout 1995 Amnesty International has continually expressed its concern about the human rights situation in Afghanistan to the international community. In February a report entitled *Afghanistan: The human rights and the refugee crisis* (ASA 11/02/95) called attention to the plight of thousands of Afghans who had fled their country and sought asylum all over the world. In April Amnesty International produced a report entitled *Afghanistan: Executions, amputations and possible deliberate and arbitrary killings* (ASA 11/05/95). This report examined the punishments ordered by Islamic courts set up in areas controlled by the Taleban. The latest report, published as part of the wider campaign by Amnesty International to protect and promote women's human rights, looked at the situation of women in Afghanistan. *Women in Afghanistan: A human rights catastrophe* urged the government and armed opposition forces of Afghanistan to publicly commit themselves to safeguarding women's human rights, to ensure that both government forces and armed groups allied to them are prevented from committing human rights violations and to ensure that government forces do not collude in human rights abuses committed by armed political groups and do not lend support to such groups in ways that facilitate human rights abuses.

Afghan armed groups, including those represented in the transitional government, have claimed that they wished to "restore" religious and humane standards. In practice, they have killed, tortured, raped, abducted and secretly detained tens of thousands of civilians with a

blatant disregard for internationally recognized basic standards of humane behaviour. Amnesty International urges the transitional government authorities and the leaders of all warring factions in Afghanistan to respect and commit themselves to human rights and the implementation of humanitarian law. The organization also urges that armed groups reveal the truth about human rights abuses, exercise effective control to prevent abuses and to end deliberate and arbitrary killings. In particular, torture and the ill-treatment of detainees should be prevented, as should hostage-taking, the holding of prisoners of conscience and unacknowledged detention. The fate of all unacknowledged detainees should also be clarified.