

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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Afghanistan Human Rights Review – Put human rights into law, policy and practice

UN Human Rights Council adoption of Universal Periodic Review outcome on Afghanistan

Amnesty International urges the Afghan government, following the latest UN review of the country's progress on protecting and promoting human rights, to ensure that the human rights gains of the past 13 years are not lost, and that safeguards are in place to protect human rights beyond 2014, when international engagement in the country will have significantly decreased. With the winding down of international involvement in the country, the Afghan government must ensure that it does not falter on its human rights obligations.

Afghanistan endorsed 178 out of 224 recommendations made by other states during its second "Universal Periodic Review" – the four-yearly review held under the auspices of the UN to track member states' progress in upholding human rights.

Amnesty International regrets, however, Afghanistan's rejection of recommendations for a moratorium on the death penalty. Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases, without exception, as a violation of the right to life as proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is the premeditated and cold-blooded killing of a human being by the state in the name of justice and is the ultimate cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment. The organisation urges the Afghan government to reconsider its position on the death penalty and to establish an immediate moratorium on executions, as a first step towards abolishing the death penalty. Amnesty International, legal experts and other human rights groups have also expressed serious concerns that trials fall below international standards of fairness which may lead to the innocent being executed.

Measures to prevent violence against women must also be consolidated. Only a fraction of such cases have been prosecuted under the Elimination of Violence Against Women Law. Amnesty International calls on the government to implement the law fully, as recommended by 26 states and supported by Afghanistan.

The organization is also concerned that women's participation in the peace and reconciliation process has remained marginal to date. Amnesty International therefore welcomes Afghanistan's support of 14 recommendations made during the review to strengthen women's participation in political processes and decision-making, including in the peace process, as required by UN Security Council resolutions on Women, Peace and Security.

Urgent measures are also needed to address the suffering of Afghanistan's substantial and growing internally displaced population and to minimise future displacement. Amnesty

International welcomes Afghanistan's acceptance of recommendations to address the suffering of victims of armed conflict, including internally displaced persons. The organization urges the government to allocate adequate financial and human resources swiftly to implement its National Policy on Internally Displaced Persons.

As international military engagement in Afghanistan declines, it is crucially important that the capacity and independence of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission is strengthened to enable it to carry out its vital role in monitoring and protecting human rights effectively in the country, as recommended by 11 states. Any appointment of human rights commissioners must be in line with the Paris Principles.

The fragile human rights situation in Afghanistan requires a concerted effort on the part of the Afghan government to fulfil its international legal obligations and address impunity for human rights abuses by state and non-state actors, as recommended in the review. To this end the justice system – the gatekeeper for human rights in the country – must be strengthened in line with international standards and corruption rooted out. Any new laws and policies must only serve to strengthen – not weaken – human rights and rule of law in Afghanistan.