

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

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Afghanistan: Calling for fair and thorough investigations for crimes against women

Amnesty International calls on the Afghan government to ensure that the recently announced investigations into the deaths of four Afghan women, in separate incidents in northern Afghanistan, are conducted thoroughly, impartially and without undue delay. The Afghan government has an obligation to demonstrate its intention to uphold the rule of law and end the culture of violence through which women continue to be targeted and victimised.

On 1st May 2005, the bodies of three Afghan women were found on a roadside in the northern town of Pul I Khumri, Baghlan province. The victims were reportedly raped and strangled. The exact motive for the killings is as yet unclear despite the discovery of a note close to the bodies which allegedly linked the killings to the women's association with NGOs in Afghanistan. Media reports state that the Afghan Youth Convention has claimed responsibility. Amnesty International calls for thorough investigations of these killings by the Afghan state, regardless of claims of responsibility by any agency.

Amnesty International has consistently highlighted concerns about grave human rights abuses and violations directed at women and has decried the continuing impunity of those responsible. In May 2005, the organisation raised the case of 29-year-old Amina from Badakshan province, sentenced to death by stoning. The *ulema* (local religious council) is alleged to have ordered her extra-judicial execution after she was found guilty of adultery. Latest reports suggest that Amina was initially stoned and eventually beaten to death. Amnesty International is aware that a number of individuals in this case have been arrested, including the head of the *ulema* but fears that they will not be brought to justice. To date, the Afghan government has rarely investigated crimes against women and has displayed a poor record in ensuring that serious efforts are made to hold to account perpetrators of grave human rights abuses.

Background

Amnesty International has long been concerned about the effectiveness and capacity of the criminal justice system when conducting investigations of human rights violations and abuses. The organisation has documented a pattern of human rights violations committed by the police and judiciary, including unfair trials; use of torture; the application of the death penalty; and the

high level of discrimination and denial of access to justice, particularly those faced by women.

The Afghan government faces the enormous task of guaranteeing protection of human rights and to ensure the implementation of measures to establish the rule of law. It has a duty to ensure that perpetrators of such appalling crimes are properly investigated and punished. Amnesty International is pressing for successful prosecutions that would send a clear message that violence against women will not be tolerated by the state.