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Pakistan: Swat peace deal threatens human rights

The Pakistani government must ensure it protects the human rights of nearly two million people in the Swat valley and neighbouring Malakand district, Amnesty International said today. This follows the announcement that the government entered a truce with insurgents, known as the Pakistani Taleban, in Swat Valley that could legitimise the human rights abuses that have been taking place in the region as the Taleban influence has increased.

“The government is reneging on its duty to protect the human rights of people from Swat Valley by handing them over to Taleban insurgents,” said Sam Zarifi, Amnesty International’s Asia-Pacific Director. “Previously the government has launched indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks against the Taleban that have mostly harmed civilians. Now the human rights of these civilians will be in jeopardy if they live under Taleban laws.”

The influence of the Pakistani Taleban has already been felt by the people of Swat Valley, with the unlawful killing of scores of government workers, as well as those whom they view as violating their edicts. They have also publicly whipped men for shaving their beards, destroyed shops for selling music and forcibly prohibited women from leaving their houses, unless escorted by a male relative.

“Girls and women have been systematically targeted by the Taleban for gender based violence and discrimination. Their rights to freedom of movement, work and education have been severely curtailed. The Pakistani government cannot just abandon these people and sign away their rights,” said Sam Zarifi.

Since 2007, when a previous peace deal fell apart, between 250,000 – 500,000 people have been forced to flee their homes in the Swat valley.

Amnesty International has previously warned about the situation for civilians in the Swat Valley. <http://www.amnesty.org/en/for-media/press-releases/pakistan-government-must-protect-swat-valley-residents-abuses-20090212>