

AI Index: PRE 01/216/2010
29 June 2010

Petraeus must focus on civilian protection in Afghanistan

General David Petraeus, the US commander set to take charge of NATO operations in Afghanistan, must redouble efforts to minimise civilian casualties during military operations there, Amnesty International said today.

The organisation is also calling on General Petraeus, who is currently attending nomination hearings in the US Senate to replace General Stanley McChrystal as commander of international forces in Afghanistan, to ensure soldiers are held accountable for their actions.

“General David Petraeus has to prioritise the protection of Afghans and ensure that any troops who violate Afghan civilians’ human rights are held accountable,” said Sam Zarifi, Asia Pacific Director for Amnesty International. “Change in command should not change the US and NATO’s commitment to protect civilians.”

General McChrystal introduced a Tactical Directive in July 2009 intended to minimise civilian casualties.

The United Nations found a 28 percent reduction in civilian deaths caused by NATO and US forces in the second half of 2009 compared with 2008, although Amnesty International has received credible reports of an increase in night raids conducted by the international military forces in the first half of 2010.

“There have been some limited improvements. General Petraeus needs to take the next step, and set up a unified mechanism for providing accountability and compensation to civilians for deaths and damages caused by NATO and US troops,” said Sam Zarifi.

“Transparent chains of command and rules of engagement that abide by international law must be established for all forces, so that victims and their families can make complaints, inquire about investigations, and ultimately, receive justice” said Sam Zarifi.

The Taliban and other insurgent groups cause more than two-thirds of civilian casualties in Afghanistan. However, this does not diminish the responsibility of Afghan, NATO and US forces to abide by international humanitarian law, Amnesty International pointed out.

“General McChrystal’s efforts to minimize civilian casualties have been criticized by some as restricting the military’s ability to act. But these critics ignore the fact that respect for international law, including human rights law and international humanitarian law, by all parties involved, is a prerequisite for bringing security to Afghanistan,” said Sam Zarifi.

Related

Amnesty International report focusing on the deaths of two brothers in a Kandahar night raid in 2008: ['Getting away with murder? The impunity of international forces in Afghanistan'](#)

Amnesty International background paper and releases on the [Kunduz airstrike of 4 September 2009](#)

Amnesty International Report, 10 June 2010: ['As if Hell fell on me': The human rights crisis in northwest Pakistan'](#)