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Kyrgyzstan urged to provide truth and justice for victims of violence

The Kyrgyzstani authorities are failing to provide justice for the thousands of victims of human rights abuses during four days of violent ethnic clashes which tore through southern Kyrgyzstan in June 2010 Amnesty International said in a report published today.

Partial Truth and Selective Justice, examines the efforts to establish the truth about what happened during four days that saw large-scale arson, looting and violent attacks, including killings and sexual violence sweep through southern Kyrgyzstan, disproportionately affecting majority Uzbek-populated areas. Hundreds were left dead and hundreds of thousands were forced to flee their homes.

The report also investigates efforts to provide accountability for the human rights abuses committed by all parties to the violence.

“The apparent ethnic bias of investigators and the inability of the criminal justice system to investigate and prosecute abuses impartially and fairly can only increase the sentiment of impunity among perpetrators and injustice amongst victims.” said Nicola Duckworth, Director of the Europe and Central Asia Programme.

“Unless this trend is reversed quickly, the opportunity to ensure that justice prevails will be lost.”

Efforts to restore order to the regions affected by the violence, and investigate the crimes committed during it, have been undermined by apparent ethnic bias and ongoing human rights violations.

Reports of arbitrary detentions, torture and ill-treatment and unfair trials are widespread.

Search operations by security forces following the violence, ostensibly to seize weapons and detain suspects, were reportedly carried out using excessive force. Hundreds of men, the majority Uzbek, were arbitrarily detained and allegedly beaten during raids and later in detention.

By 10 November 2010, official figures revealed that 271 individuals had been arrested in relation to the June violence. The overwhelming majority of those brought to trial for their involvement in the June events have also been ethnic Uzbeks.

Many of these trials have been seriously flawed with lawyers being harassed outside courtrooms, and judges refusing to call defence witnesses or recognise that ‘confessions’ may have been extracted under torture.

Human rights defenders and lawyers have frequently been assaulted by groups of Kyrgyz men and women, threatened with violence and verbally abused for defending the rights of Uzbek detainees, victims and their families.

In the absence of independent and impartial investigations into the violence competing versions of events have emerged.

“An objective account of what happened is urgently needed to correct the distortions and myths that have built up around the June violence.” said Nicola Duckworth

“To date, however, the development of contradictory, ethnically biased narratives about the origins, perpetrators and victims of the violence has gone largely unchecked. There are still pressing questions over whether or not security forces took part in the violence and whether or not attacks against civilians constitute crimes against humanity.”

A National Commission of Inquiry was established in July 2010, but has yet to publish a report on the violence. The Commission has been consistently undermined by a lack of clear mandate and terms of reference, the resignation of several prominent independent members, and its apparent failure to conduct thorough investigations.

Amnesty International was told, time and again, that the failure to independently, thoroughly and impartially investigate the human rights abuses committed during ethnic violence in the south in 1990, and to hold those who committed crimes accountable, allowed for the seeds of further violence to be sown.

“Twenty years on, the Kyrgyzstani authorities are in danger of repeating and compounding these mistakes. The early indications are that the national inquiries and criminal investigations will offer, at best, only partial truths and selective justice” said Nicola Duckworth

“In the current climate of fear, mistrust, rumour, ethnic polarisation and continuing political instability, the international inquiry now offers the best hope for a comprehensive, unbiased and credible investigation. It is essential that it delivers this.”

The report can be found at: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR58/022/2010/en>