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**AFGHANISTAN: AI APPEALS TO INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TO TAKE THE  
INITIATIVE TO PROMOTE AND PROTECT HUMAN RIGHTS**

As the governments of Iran and Pakistan agree to a joint initiative on Afghanistan, Amnesty International renewed its call for the international community to play a role in bringing to an end the catastrophic human rights abuses caused by 16 years of conflict.

“Responsibility does not stop with Afghanistan’s neighbours, but is shared by all those who have supported and armed Afghanistan’s factions,” Amnesty International said. “The international community should seize any opportunity to end this human rights disaster.”

For years, the United States and its Western European allies, the former Soviet Union, Pakistan, Iran and Saudi Arabia sent enormous supplies of arms to Afghanistan.

“In effect, these countries armed the perpetrators of deliberate or indiscriminate killings, torture and rape and abductions,” Amnesty International said.

The human rights organization said: “Concerted efforts by Pakistan and Iran to promote peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan would be welcome, but we are looking closely to see if this initiative results in concrete improvements in human rights.”

Agence-France Presse quoted official sources on 10 January as saying : “Iran and Pakistan have agreed to support the efforts to bring the fratricidal fighting in Afghanistan to an end”. The agreement reportedly came at the end of a visit to Pakistan by Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati who met Pakistan’s President Farooq Ahmed Leghari, Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto and Foreign Minister Asef Ahmed Ali.

Tens of thousands of civilians have been killed in various parts of Afghanistan by the bombs dropped and rockets launched deliberately or indiscriminately against their homes, schools, hospitals or even places where they have sought shelter from such attacks.

In only a few weeks between 23 December and 11 January, at least 54 people were killed and 172 people injured -- including 14 children - in what appear to be indiscriminate rocket and artillery attacks against residential areas of the city. The attacks were reportedly carried out by the Taleban forces which like all other factions have shown their complete disregard for civilian life in an attempt

to take over Kabul. Government forces have also been responsible for gross human rights abuses in areas not under their control.

“This cycle of human rights abuses in Afghanistan can only come to an end if all governments in a position to effect change contribute to a settlement of the conflict in which human rights are promoted and respected,” said Amnesty International.

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