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Pakistan: Amnesty International Update on Displacement and Civilian Casualties in NWFP, Pakistan

“There is no sign that the central Pakistan government has prepared for the exodus of civilians,” said Sam Zarifi, Amnesty International’s Asia-Pacific director. “As the military operations spread, most likely to Swat next, the government has to ensure that the fleeing civilians have adequate food, shelter, and health care.”

The Pakistani NGO Al Khidmat told Amnesty International in Timergara, the main town in Lower Dir, that it had registered at least 65,000 displaced people. As the operations apparently ended after four days, Al Khidmat said it was the only group assisting the displaced population, without any assistance from the central government.

Meanwhile, the Pakistani Taleban issued a written warning to journalists in Timergara, Dir, threatening them if they persisted in presenting material against the Taleban and the Nizam-e Adl regulation that gave the Taleban administrative control over a wide swath of NWFP. The Pakistani Taleban warned journalists would be tried in the Taleban’s Sharia courts and called the press club in Timergara today, threatening to send a car full of explosives.

“The Taleban’s warning against journalist shows again their absolute disdain for human rights,” Zarifi said. “The Taleban have consistently jeopardized the well-being of the people living under their control.”

Update on the situation in Maidan tehseel (subdistrict) Lower Dir:

The District Hospital in Timergara confirmed a total of 13 civilians killed during the fighting, including eight civilians killed today: two women, a boy, and five men (two of them primary school teachers). Eyewitnesses told Amnesty International in Timergara that at least 28-30 houses had been completely destroyed while dozens of houses have been partially damaged.

Civilians told Amnesty International that security forces had warned civilians to evacuate their villages during the operations. Locals reported use of helicopter gunships and heavy artillery again today, though the fighting seemed to have ended by day’s end.

On Wednesday, most businesses in Timergara observed a general strike and several towns in Lower Dir witnessed demonstrations against the army operations. The demonstrations were attended by local workers and leaders of most of Pakistan’s major parties.

Update from Buner:

Amnesty International observed hundreds of civilians leaving Buner district as the Pakistani army and Frontier Corps units launched operations around 4 p.m. today, using jet fighters and helicopter gunships.

Forces were moved from Mardan through the area known as Bakhshali, according to our sources in Buner. Thousands of people are arriving in adjacent Sawabi and Mardan districts. Security forces have asked the people fleeing the area not to move in small groups as they might get hit because the Taliban are also moving in small groups. Curfew has been announced in all the main towns on the main road starting from Shehbaz Garaha till Ambela, Buner. Those who are leaving Buner for safer places are facing difficulties because of the curfew.