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## **Pakistan: Civilians trapped in conflict zone lack food, health care, water**

The Pakistani military and Taleban insurgents should immediately allow tens of thousands of civilians caught in the middle of ferocious fighting to leave, Amnesty International said today.

More than half a million Pakistanis have fled the conflict in the last three weeks, bringing the total number of civilians displaced in the last year to 1.3 million. But approximately 700,000 people remain trapped in Swat valley according to a local parliamentarian.

Residents of Malakand, in Pakistan's North West Frontier Province (NWFP), who have fled their homes in the last two days have told Amnesty International that civilians left behind face intense combat, much of it in civilian areas, but also suffer from lack of fuel, electricity, food, and access to medical care.

"The thousands of people in Malakand, who have not been able to flee, now face a major humanitarian crisis," said Sam Zarifi, Amnesty International's Asia-Pacific director. "The Taleban have shown no regard for their safety and well-being, but now the army seems to be pursuing a scorched earth policy."

The Pakistani military has imposed a 'shoot on sight' policy for anyone violating an indefinite curfew established in Malakand. The curfew was announced from local mosques and through loudspeakers mounted on pick-up trucks.

Authorities relaxed the curfew briefly yesterday in the city of Mingora, also in NWFP, allowing thousands of people to flee, often on foot. Several people told Amnesty International that they had to leave behind family members who could not physically flee or who lived outside Mingora, and thus did not benefit from the lifting of the curfew.

"The Pakistani military should act immediately to help civilians reach safety, and to ensure that food, fuel, and medical supplies reach those still trapped in Malakand," said Sam Zarifi.

Civilians from various areas of Malakand district told Amnesty International in the past two days that electricity in the area has been cut off, and generators have stopped working because of lack of diesel fuel, creating major problems for hospitals, as well as for food storage. Nearly all ambulance service has now ended.

Meanwhile, residents told Amnesty International that Taleban insurgents have used health facilities, schools, and residential areas to hide and launch attacks from, thus knowingly drawing a military response from the Pakistani military.

“The Pakistani government seems to relax the curfew at times to get civilians away from fighting,” said Sam Zarifi. “But even after the civilians have left, the warring sides have to avoid targeting civilian objects like hospitals and schools.”