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**PUBLIC STATEMENT
AFGHANISTAN
HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES AGAINST WOMEN**

In recent months a petition in support of women's rights in Afghanistan has been circulated by the National Organisation for Women in the USA. While welcoming any initiatives highlighting the plight of women in Afghanistan, Amnesty International does not as a matter of principle endorse statements that do not fall strictly within its mandate.

In solidarity with this worldwide campaign to promote women's rights, Amnesty International is reiterating today its position on the issue -- based on corroborated evidence of the human rights situation in Afghanistan -- which may in part differ from the above mentioned petition.

Amnesty International has continuously brought the plight of Afghan women to the attention of the international community and has urged armed groups as well as countries supporting them to acknowledge their responsibility for human rights violations in Afghanistan and end the cycle of abuses there.

Scores of women have been abducted and raped by members of the various political factions, often being treated as the spoils of war. Thousands of women have been indiscriminately killed in fighting between opposing sides in the conflict, and hundreds of thousands of women and children have been displaced or forced to flee the country as a result of systematic human rights abuses.

In recent years, the Taleban have imposed a new form of repression against women in Kabul, Herat, Kandahar and other areas they control. The situation of women in these areas deserves special attention by the international community.

Tens of thousands of women remain restricted to their homes under Taleban edicts banning them from seeking employment, education or leaving home unaccompanied by a male relative. Other measures restricting women include the closure of women's *hammams* (public baths). Women are also barred from the streets for certain periods during the fasting month of *Ramadan*.

These restrictions have been enforced through the use of cruel, inhuman and degrading punishments and ill-treatment including the beating of women by Taleban guards in detention centres or in public places.

Amnesty International welcomes any move to restore Afghan women's rights to education, employment, gender equality and access to health facilities and will continue to consider women detained or physically restricted on account of their gender as prisoners of conscience.

The organization fully supports any initiative seeking to highlight the flagrant abuse of women's human rights in Afghanistan, and which recognises the vital role that the international community can play in bringing such abuses to an end.

Background

Amnesty International takes no position on the question of recognition of any party or government but calls on all armed political groups in Afghanistan to respect fundamental human rights, in accordance with international human rights standards and the principles of humanitarian law.

Governments with a vested interest in Afghanistan who appear to provide military support to the warring factions must accept responsibility for fuelling human rights abuses. Governments which provide political and material support to Afghanistan's warring factions should hold leaders of armed groups to account for the human rights abuses committed against women in Afghanistan.

However, responsibility to end the suffering of Afghan women is not confined to governments directly involved in the country. In September 1995, at the Fourth UN World Conference on Women, governments of the world committed themselves to ensuring the full implementation of the human rights of women and of the girl child as an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

In the Beijing Declaration they pledged their determination "to advance the goals of equality, development and peace for all women everywhere in the interest of all humanity". It is now their chance to enforce respect for women's human rights in Afghanistan.

[See *Women in Afghanistan: A human rights catastrophe* (ASA 11/03/95), May 199; *Women in Afghanistan: The violations continue* (ASA 11/05/97), June 1997]