

AI Index: PRE 01/259/2013
03 June 2013

NATO must address human rights in meeting on Afghanistan's future

International and Afghan military forces must preserve the modest human rights gains of the past 12 years and ensure that the rights of the Afghan people are protected during and after the ongoing security transition, Amnesty International said ahead of next week's NATO meeting in Brussels.

NATO defence ministers are meeting in Brussels on 4-5 June to discuss, among other things, the progress of transition of security responsibilities from NATO/ISAF forces to the national Afghan army and the post-2014 "transformation period".

"Afghanistan is going through a crucial period with the security transition well under way, and it is vital that human rights are not forgotten by the Afghan government or its international partners during this process," Isabelle Arradon, Deputy Asia Pacific Director of Amnesty International said.

"The country is still facing enormous human rights challenges that must be top of any agenda that concerns Afghanistan's future."

Civilians continue to bear the brunt of the violence in the Afghan conflict, and concerns remain about the lack of accountability of Afghan and international security forces for civilian harm and loss of livelihoods resulting from their military operations.

According to UN figures, more than 2,700 civilians were killed in 2012 with Afghan and ISAF forces responsible for eight per cent of the casualties.

"Both international and Afghan forces have emphasised their commitment to protect civilians. To that effect, NATO/ISAF must urgently undertake effective and thorough investigations into all allegations of civilian casualties and harm resulting from their military operations to avoid leaving a legacy of unresolved claims after 2014," said Isabelle Arradon, Amnesty International's Deputy Asia-Pacific Director.

Amnesty International recognizes that NATO/ISAF has made efforts to reduce civilian casualties, including through tactical directives and operational guidance.

However, ISAF's Civilian Casualties Tracking Cell (CCTC) is still not fully resourced and needs to be, as well as expanded to cover all "government agencies", including various intelligence agencies and private contractors who conduct military operations in Afghanistan.

NATO/ISAF states must also accelerate efforts in assisting the Afghan government to create a mechanism to monitor and investigate civilian casualties and injuries attributed to the Afghan National Security

Forces (ANSF), and to ensure timely and effective remedies when such acts do occur.

More focus should be put on international human rights and humanitarian law training, and gender-sensitivity training, for all relevant Afghan security personnel, including the Afghan Local Police.

More than half a million people remain displaced in Afghanistan, mainly as a result of the conflict, and there is a real risk of this number rising even further unless there are significant security improvements in the short-term.

Many displaced Afghans are forced to live in slum conditions with poor sanitation and inadequate access to water, food, education and healthcare, as well as a threat of being forcibly evicted.

“As NATO countries discuss the security transition, they must address the impact of the conflict on displacement. International and Afghan forces must increase efforts to monitor the impact of military operations on local populations, and take all measures to minimize displacement in areas affected by operations,” said Arradon.

Many Afghan women are concerned that the hard-won human rights gains are precarious and could be compromised and traded away as the Afghan government seeks a political settlement with the Taliban and other insurgent groups.

All states including NATO/ISAF contributing states and the government of Afghanistan must implement UN Security Council resolutions relevant to the security of women in Afghanistan and their role in conflict resolution.

Only nine of the 70 members on the High Peace Council are women, the Afghan government’s body charged with leading proposed peace and reconciliation talks with the Taliban and other armed groups.

“Sadly, even those few women that are on the High Peace Council are already being sidelined in key peace negotiations,” said Arradon.

“The inclusion of women in the peace talks must be genuine and meaningful, with their priority concerns fully reflected.”

Gender parity should be sought in all peace negotiating teams, including peace jirgas (tribal councils) and provisional councils. At the very least, in line with the Afghan constitutional guarantee for representation of women in Parliament, which sets a 25 per cent quota for women.