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Kyrgyzstan neighbours urged to open borders

Amnesty International is calling on all countries neighbouring Kyrgyzstan to open their borders to thousands of people desperately seeking refuge from the violence that has engulfed the southern part of the country in the last five days.

The violence in and around the southern cities of Osh and Jalal-Abad and towns and villages in the region with large Uzbek populations has claimed the lives of hundreds of people and left thousands injured.

Amnesty International has received reports that armed young men continue to roam the streets, setting houses on fire, beating, shooting and killing people they believe to be Uzbek.

Up to 100,000 people, mainly of Uzbek origin, and predominantly women and children, are believed to have sought refuge from the violence in Uzbekistan, where the authorities are trying to accommodate those fleeing the violence.

“The Uzbekistani authorities must also ensure unconditional and unhindered access to international humanitarian organizations that have the expertise and resources to deal with such a mass influx of refugees,” said Maisy Weicherding, Amnesty International’s expert on Central Asia.

“There is an urgent need to provide humanitarian assistance to all those who fled from Kyrgyzstan to Uzbekistan, including those who are currently still waiting to enter Uzbekistan, to register and assess the protection needs of everyone, including unaccompanied children, and for families to be reunited.”

Amnesty International has learnt that while many of those fleeing violence are being sheltered in tents, schools and other public buildings in Uzbekistan, others are without adequate accommodation .

“Food, water, shelter, as well as essential medical services must be provided to all, and their security must be ensured,” said Maisy Weicherding.

Amnesty International is particularly concerned for the safety of individuals who fled persecution in Uzbekistan over the last five years and were either recognized as refugees in Kyrgyzstan or were living in hiding in the south of Kyrgyzstan for fear of being forcibly returned to Uzbekistan.

These individuals cannot return to Uzbekistan where they are at risk of torture and long term imprisonment in cruel and inhuman conditions.

Amnesty International has received information that many are now living in fear of their lives, hiding from

armed gangs who target Uzbeks.

“It is imperative that in this volatile and unpredictable situation the interim government and local authorities in Kyrgyzstan ensure adequate protection for all people in the country and in particular for the most vulnerable,” Maisy Weicherding said.

“The authorities in Kyrgyzstan must also prepare to shelter and feed people fleeing from the south to the north and may also need international humanitarian assistance.”