

RELEASED IN FULL



June 14, 2004

The Honorable George W Bush
President of the United States
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

On behalf of Amnesty International USA, I write regarding your upcoming meeting with President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan. As Afghanistan rebuilds, both the United States and the Afghan governments have a duty and responsibility to take immediate and concrete actions to protect the human rights of Afghanistan's nearly 30 million inhabitants and ensure its long-term stability. Amnesty International is particularly concerned about security for civilians, the protection of women's rights, the treatment of detainees, and accountability for abuses. Your meeting with President Karzai presents an important opportunity to address these concerns.

We have seen some positive steps in Kabul, such as the building of a professional police force, the training of the judiciary, police and lawyers, some legal reforms and physical rehabilitation of prisons and courts. However, it is extremely worrying that progress is limited to the capital while human rights remain far from realized for Afghans living in other provinces. To address this issue, the international peace keeping force should be expanded outside Kabul to allow for the rule of law to be established.

We are encouraged that there have been some improvements in the human rights situation since the end of the Taleban regime. We are deeply concerned, however, by the abuses that continue, especially against women. The international community has failed to fulfill its promises to bring freedom and equality to the women of Afghanistan. Violations of the rights of women and girls, including physical abuse, underage marriage, the exchange of girls to settle feuds continue, and the denial of their rights by the edicts of local leaders.

Amnesty International has also reported on torture and death in custody including in US detention facilities. We urge you and President Karzai to investigate all such allegations, to make the findings public, and to hold accountable those responsible for abuse. We are concerned that the International Committee of the Red Cross has been denied full access to all who are detained at US facilities and that a recent request for access by the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) has been refused. In addition, the US military has repeatedly denied access to independent human rights bodies, including Amnesty International. We urge the US military in Afghanistan to ensure that access is now granted. We also urge the Afghan government to give full support to the AIHRC in their request to gain access to detention facilities. While Amnesty International welcomes the recent statement by a US Army spokesman that the service is considering a "Top-to Bottom" review of its 20 detention centers in Afghanistan, these centers should be identified publicly by name, the number of prisoners held in these facilities should be made public, and the facilities should be opened for monitoring by the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, and Amnesty International.

Amnesty International also remains concerned about human rights abuses perpetrated by regional commanders allied with the United States in its operations in the south and east of

Afghanistan. We urge you, Mr. President, to make clear that the United States opposes abuses, including the recruitment of child soldiers and abuses against women.

Finally, we urge you and President Karzai to make a joint statement announcing the establishment of a mechanism to investigate past human rights abuses committed during the 23 years of armed conflict in Afghanistan stretching from 1979 to 2002. To date, justice has been denied to victims of war crimes, crimes against humanity and other grave human rights violations that occurred during the civil war. Failure to address past and present human rights abuses seriously undermines the establishment of effective rule of law in the country.

Afghanistan is facing a critical moment in its ongoing reconstruction effort and its future will remain in peril unless the protection of human rights is given more serious consideration. Mr. President, your leadership is critical to improve respect for and protection of basic human rights in Afghanistan. To achieve this, the US government must lead efforts to follow through on the pledges made at the Berlin donor conferences. Specifically, Amnesty International urges the US government to act on the recommendations below.

Security Outside of Kabul

Amnesty International urges the US government to work with United Nations to:

- Increase security throughout the country by continuing to expand the international peacekeeping force outside Kabul.

Amnesty International urges the United States to work with the Karzai government to:

- Immediately initiate judicial training projects, especially outside Kabul.
- Pay particular attention to the needs of the police outside Kabul. Establish clear lines of financial accountability at an institutional level and provide equipment to facilitate consistent and effective policing practice.
- Appoint an independent police Ombudsperson to investigate abuses by the police.
- Reconstruct and rehabilitate detention and prison facilities, including juvenile detention facilities so as to meet with basic standards for the treatment of prisoners.
- Immediately establish a moratorium on all executions.

Women's Rights

Amnesty International urges the United States to call on the Karzai government to:

- Criminalize violence against women, including domestic violence, rape, the sale or handover of women and girls to settle disputes, and underage forced marriages.
- Remove all laws that discriminate against women.
- Incorporate gender mainstreaming into the reconstruction process, especially in key ministries and at the highest levels of government.
- Audit all projects or programs agreed to in Berlin for their impact on women.
- Train law enforcement officials, members of the judiciary, and government officials on the protection of the rights of women.

US and Afghan Detention Centers

Amnesty International urges the United States and Afghan governments to:

- Make public the number and location of US and Afghan detention facilities.
- Make public the number of prisoners held in these facilities, including women and children, and begin immediate classification of prisoners.
- Allow immediate and full access to ICRC and human rights organizations, including the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission and Amnesty International.
- Investigate allegations of abuse in US and Afghan detention facilities across Afghanistan.

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- Launch a full investigation into interrogation practices of detainees in US and Afghan custody and make public the findings.
- Give detainees immediate access to their families and lawyers.

US Military Operations

Amnesty International urges the US government to:

- Ensure that regional commanders allied with the United States in its operations in Afghanistan, particularly in the South and East, respect international human rights standards, and are not involved in the recruitment of child soldiers, and abuses against women.
- Investigate and issue reports on the bombing of civilian targets in a timely manner.

Past Human Rights Abuses

Amnesty International urges the US and Afghan governments to:

- Make a joint statement on establishing a mechanism to investigate human rights abuses committed during 23 years of armed conflict in Afghanistan from 1979 to 2002.

Mr. President, I hope you will take this opportunity to set in motion an agenda to improve human rights in Afghanistan and we look forward to supporting your efforts on these issues. Thank you very much for your consideration of these important matters.

Sincerely,



William F. Schulz
Executive Director