



United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan

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UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER ALARMED AT WORSENING HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN

KABUL – 5 MARCH 2009 – The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Navi Pillay presents her annual report on Afghanistan to the Human Rights Council in Geneva today.

The report highlights concerns over the deteriorating human rights situation in Afghanistan, particularly with regard to civilian casualties. The High Commissioner urged anti-government elements and pro-government forces to ensure greater respect for the protection of civilians, including women and children.

Violence against women such as rape, “honour killings”, early and forced marriage, sexual abuse, and slavery remain widespread. “Violence is tolerated or condoned within the family and community, within traditional and religious leadership circles as well as the formal and informal justice system – in this regard the Afghan Government has failed to adequately protect the rights of women despite constitutional guarantees”, said Pillay.

The High Commissioner noted that there has been a dramatic increase in threats and intimidation against women in public life or who work outside the home. Women working with government agencies, national and international organisations, journalists, police, and lawyers have all reported death-threat letters and phone calls. As a result, many women in public life have been forced to curtail their activities or abandon their jobs. The report calls for the protection of women and girls in both the private and public sphere and this must be translated into policies and concrete programmes.

The report also highlights that the failure to prosecute perpetrators of past crimes and continuing violations undermines the legitimacy of Afghan law enforcement and judicial institutions. This in turn has eroded people's confidence in Government and public institutions. The High Commissioner urged the Government and the international community to re-commit to addressing the issue of impunity.

Freedom of expression came under significant threat throughout 2008, with threats and intimidation directed against civil society groups, the media, including the killing of journalists. Pillay said: “In the months leading up to the 2009 elections, the media will continue to self-censor or be pressured into broadcasting only those views which are favourable to certain political interests and candidates and citizens will be intimidated through threats and attacks from fully expressing their opinions.”

The report also noted the Government's continued use of the death penalty in 2008, after a de facto moratorium of three years ended in October 2007. The High Commissioner for Human Rights calls upon the Government to reconsider this policy in light of weaknesses within the judicial and law enforcement system and in line with growing international opinion.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

- A full copy of the Annual Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the Situation of Human Rights in Afghanistan, in Pashto, Dari and English can be found at www.unama-afg.org
- For more information media should contact Nilab Mobarez (Pashto, Dari and English) on 0797 662 503 or Dan McNorton (English) on 0700 250 358.