

Afghan Warlords Kill At Will, Says UN Envoy

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By Ahmed Rashid/ Lahore

The United Nations has issued a trenchant condemnation of all the nations and agencies involved in Afghanistan for failing to curb warlords and clamp down on arbitrary executions.

The report calls for an international commission of inquiry backed by the international community.

Another report, by the International Crisis Group, strongly criticises President Hamid Karzai's government, the UN, America and western coalition forces for doing nothing to improve human rights.

Western and Afghan leaders have said that, to preserve the fragile stability in the country, the pursuit of justice is not an option at present.

In reply, both reports say that unless human rights issues are addressed, national reconciliation will never take place, the warlords will remain in power and movement towards greater freedom and democracy will be permanently impaired.

Asma Jahangir, who reports for the UN on unlawful killings, has called for an independent and international commission which will "undertake ... a stocktaking of grave human rights violations in the past that could constitute a catalogue of crimes against humanity".

Her report, which has not yet been published, will be presented next month at the UN annual meeting on human rights in Geneva.

It calls for much greater international assistance in rebuilding the Afghan judicial system, strengthening the country's human rights commission and making respect for human rights a key part of western policy towards Afghanistan.

The report gives details of widespread killings by the Taliban and the former Northern Alliance, including the alliance's massacre of several hundred Taliban fighters after their regime was ousted.

America enlisted the alliance in the war against the Taliban and its leaders now dominate the Kabul government.

Miss Jahangir details how civilians continue to be killed, jailed, tortured and intimidated with impunity by warlords.

"There is a climate of fear and those who leak information on violations of human rights are threatened."

She also says that America has failed to release its internal reports on many incidents in which its troops or aircraft accidentally killed Afghan civilians.

The International Crisis Group, which issued its report this week, demanded that President Karzai remove from office Fazl Hadi Shinwari, the chief justice of the supreme court.

He has banned cable television and has given judgments against the full participation of women in social and political life.

The report said that the 80-year-old cleric was unversed in secular law and "has expanded the number of supreme court judges from nine to 137, many of whom are also unqualified in secular law". Afghanistan has

both an Islamic and secular legal system.

Robert Templer, the International Crisis Group's Asia director, said: "There are fears that the Afghan justice system has been taken over by hard-liners before the Afghan people have had a chance to express their will in a democratic process."

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