

# **Government collapse in Afghanistan marked by ‘repeated war crimes and relentless bloodshed’ - New Report**

The Taliban, United States military, and Afghan security forces were all responsible for attacks that resulted in extensive civilian suffering before the country’s government collapsed earlier this year, Amnesty International said in a new report today.

The report, *No Escape: War Crimes and Civilian Harm During The Fall Of Afghanistan To The Taliban*, documents torture, extrajudicial executions and killings by the Taliban during the final stages of the conflict in Afghanistan, as well as civilian casualties during a series of ground and air operations by the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) and US military forces.

“The months before the government collapse in Kabul were marked by repeated war crimes and relentless bloodshed committed by the Taliban, as well as deaths caused by Afghan and US forces,” said Agnès Callamard, Amnesty International’s Secretary General.

“Our new evidence shows that, far from the seamless transition of power that the Taliban claimed happened, the people of Afghanistan have once again paid with their lives.

“Homes, hospitals, schools and shops were turned into crime scenes as people were repeatedly killed and injured. The people of Afghanistan have suffered for too long, and victims must have access to justice and receive reparations.

“The International Criminal Court must reverse its misguided decision to deprioritize investigations into US and Afghan military operations, and instead follow the evidence on all possible war crimes, no matter where it leads.”

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan reported that 1,659 civilians were killed and another 3,524 injured in the first six months of 2021, an

increase of 47% from the prior year.

## Taliban atrocities

As they seized control of districts across Afghanistan in July and August 2021, members of the Taliban tortured and killed ethnic and religious minorities, former ANSDF soldiers, and those perceived as government sympathizers in reprisal attacks.

On September 6, 2021, Taliban forces attacked Bazarak town in Panjshir province. After a brief battle, approximately 20 men were captured by Taliban fighters and detained for two days, at times jailed in a pigeon coop. They were tortured, denied food, water and medical assistance, and repeatedly threatened with execution.

One of the men captured by the Taliban said: “[The] Talib had taken a knife... he was saying he wanted to behead the wounded... because they are infidels and Jews.”

Another man added: “They kept us underground. When we were asking for medical treatment of the wounded, the Taliban were saying, ‘Let them die’... There was no food and water, and no support to the wounded. They had brutal relations with us. When we were asking for water, they were saying, ‘Die of thirst’.” Torture and cruel and inhuman treatment of captives constitute war crimes.

Later the same day, the Taliban also attacked the nearby village of Urmaz, where they conducted door-to-door searches to identify people suspected of working for the former government. The fighters extrajudicially executed at least six civilian men within 24 hours, mainly by gunshots to the head, chest or heart. Such killings constitute war crimes. Eyewitnesses said that while some of the men had previously served in the ANSDF, none were in government security forces or taking part in hostilities in any way at the time of execution.

The report also documents reprisal attacks and executions of people affiliated with the former government in Spin Boldak. Amnesty International previously documented Taliban massacres of ethnic Hazaras in Ghazni and Daykundi provinces.

The full scale of the killings nationwide still remains unknown, as the Taliban cut mobile phone service, or severely restricted internet access, in many rural areas.

### Civilian casualties from US and Afghan air strikes

The report documents four air strikes - three most likely carried out by US forces, and one by the Afghan Air Force - in recent years. The strikes killed a total of 28 civilians (15 men, five women, and eight children), and injured another six.

The strikes generally resulted in civilian deaths because the US dropped explosive weapons in densely populated areas. Amnesty International has previously documented similar impacts of explosive weapons in numerous other conflicts, and supports a political declaration to curb their use.

On November 9, 2020, an air strike most likely carried out by US forces killed five civilians - including a three-month-old girl - and wounded six at a family home in the Mulla Ghulam neighborhood of Khanabad city, in Kunduz province.

A nine-year-old child who was injured in the attack said: "I was sleeping when the first bomb hit... They were telling us to hide somewhere in case the second bomb happened. My father said I had to find my younger brother. The second bomb killed my mother, my uncle, my aunt, and my sister."

Such strikes form a pattern of civilian harm that continued until the last moments of the conflict, when a US drone strike killed 10 people, including seven children, in Kabul on August 29, 2021. The US military later admitted that those killed were civilians.

### Civilians killed in ground combat

The report documents eight cases during ground combat in which a total of 12 civilians were killed (five men, one woman, and six children), and 15 more injured. Through a combination of negligence and disregard for the law, the US-trained ANDSF frequently launched mortar attacks that hit homes and killed civilians in hiding.

The fighting in Kunduz city was especially fierce in June 2021. In the suburb of Zakhail, government forces launched mortars into densely populated neighborhoods. Meanwhile, Taliban forces gained ground, using schools and mosques to launch attacks, and demanding food from families trapped in their

homes.

On June 22, 2021, one man was killed and two people were injured during a mortar attack in Zakhail. The ANDSF most likely launched the mortar from the First Police District, approximately 2.5 kilometers from the scene of the explosion. The man killed was Abdul Razaq, 20, who was recently engaged to be married. Fragments from the mortar tore open his head and stomach.

Later the same day in the same neighborhood, one child was killed and two more were injured when a mortar - again most likely launched by the ANDSF - hit a home where a family was in hiding. A metal fragment hit Manizha, a 12-year-old girl, in the spine, paralyzing and eventually killing her.

One man said the Taliban often forewarned families about combat, but they had received no similar communication from the government. He said: "The Taliban...say, 'We will be fighting tonight', and the people who can afford to leave do - but the poor people stay because they will starve if they leave. But there is no use of asking the government, when we know they are going to do nothing."

The use of mortars, whose use in populated areas is inherently indiscriminate, can constitute a war crime.

### Reparations and accountability

Multiple family members of victims of military actions told Amnesty International they did not receive sufficient, if any, reparations from the government.

One man, whose family home was destroyed in an air strike, said: "No one from the government came afterwards. We went to the district and told them what happened. No one came to us. They said, 'This is not good. It should not have happened. We share your pain'. But nothing happened."

Amnesty International is calling on the Taliban and the US government to fulfill their international obligations, and establish clear and robust mechanisms for civilians to request reparations for harm sustained during the conflict.

"The Taliban authorities now have the same legal obligation to provide reparations as the former government, and must address all issues of civilian harm seriously," said Agnès Callamard.

“Victims and their families must receive reparations, and all those suspected of responsibility must be held to account in fair trials before ordinary civilian courts and without recourse to the death penalty.”

## Methodology

Amnesty International conducted on-the-ground research in Kabul from August 1-15, 2021, and completed remote phone interviews with victims and witnesses via secure video and voice calls from August to November 2021.

Amnesty International conducted face-to-face interviews in Kabul with 65 people, and remote interviews through encrypted mobile apps with an additional 36 people, from a total of 10 provinces.

The organization’s Crisis Evidence Lab also reviewed satellite imagery, videos and photographs, medical and ballistics information, and interviewed relevant experts where necessary.

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