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## **Afghanistan: Civilians and captured combatants must be protected**

Since the 11 September attacks, Amnesty International has called for justice, not revenge. "Now that the United States of America (USA) and the United Kingdom (UK) have launched military strikes against targets in Afghanistan, their forces and their Taleban opponents must ensure full respect for human rights and the rules and principles governing international armed conflicts," Amnesty International said.

"In particular, both sides must take all necessary precautions to protect civilians. Vulnerable groups, such as women and ethnic minorities, must not be subject to further abuses. Captured combatants must be treated as Prisoners of War in accordance with the Third Geneva Convention."

In addition to air strikes from the USA and UK, the Afghan Northern Alliance is reported to have launched military attacks against forces of the Taleban, against whom they have been fighting since 1996. "Both sides have been responsible for serious human rights abuses in the context of this conflict," Amnesty International said. "We call on them to respect fully human rights and international humanitarian law."

If any suspect of the crimes of 11 September 2001 is captured during military action, they should be brought to justice fairly and without the possibility of the death penalty.

The USA, the UK and Afghanistan are all parties to the four 1949 Geneva Conventions. The Conventions, together with their two 1977 Protocols and other international treaties, constitute international humanitarian law, also known as the laws of war.

All states neighbouring Afghanistan should immediately open their borders and provide protection and humanitarian assistance to Afghan refugees with the support of the international community.

"We welcome the commitments expressed by several countries to provide protection and assistance to Afghans who are displaced or otherwise in need of urgent help. However, we call on the international community at large to intensify efforts to respond to the humanitarian emergency inside Afghanistan and in the neighbouring countries, which together already host the largest refugee population in the world," Amnesty International said.

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