

July 29, 2003

Rights Group Reports Abuses by Afghans, Some Backed by U.S.

By CARLOTTA GALL

KABUL, Afghanistan, July 28 — A human rights report has documented widespread extortion, armed robbery and kidnapping by police and intelligence officials and militias in Afghanistan. The report accuses the United States of supporting some of the worst offenders, and blames all countries for not doing enough to intervene and halt the abuses.

The 101-page report, titled "Killing You Is a Very Easy Thing for Us," by the New York-based Human Rights Watch, is a list of violent crimes committed against Afghan civilians in recent months in 12 provinces in eastern and southeastern Afghanistan. It also details threats against journalists, feminists and political activists.

The report, which is being released on Tuesday, accused soldiers, police officers, commanders and even current cabinet ministers of responsibility for much of the violence, which, it said, was occurring across Afghanistan. The perpetrators are people who came to power after the United States-led intervention that overthrew the Taliban government in 2001, and who are now abusing their authority, the report said.

"The United States in particular bears much of the responsibility for the actions of those they have propelled to power, for failing to take steps against other abusive leaders, and for impeding attempts to force them to step aside," it said. "Their continued funding, joint operations and fraternizing with warlords has sent, at best, mixed messages about their goals and intentions."

[In Washington, State Department officials said they had not yet seen the report.]

The authors of the report predicted that the warlords and abusive commanders would become more entrenched with time and could threaten the success of President Hamid Karzai's government. The report called for an expansion of the international peacekeeping force and more support for disarmament and demobilization.

The report did not criticize Mr. Karzai. Some diplomats and government officials contend that his indecisiveness and his policy of appeasing powerful warlords to keep the peace have kept many abusers in power.

"Many of these violations are preventable, but solutions will require the concerted attention and action of international and Afghan authorities alike, which to date has not been sufficiently forthcoming," Human Rights Watch said.

A Western diplomat welcomed the report for disclosing the situation on the ground.

But he said there was little international support to send more peacekeepers. "The Afghans have to police themselves," he said.

An unidentified editor supplied the title of the report, attributing it to a statement by armed men serving the defense minister, Marshal Muhammad Qasim Fahim, who came to the editor's house after he published a cartoon of President Karzai and Marshal Fahim. "They threatened me," the editor said in the report. "They said: 'Look, killing you is a very easy thing for us. Look: We have 30 bullets in our clips. I can shoot all of these 30 bullets into your chest right now, and there is no one who can stop us.' "

The most serious abuses described involved armed robbery, abduction, rape and assaults on civilians, often committed by members of the police, military and intelligence services with the knowledge of high-level commanders, the report said. Soldiers and police officers are accused of extortion, arbitrary arrests, beatings, holding people for ransom in "private prisons" and possible torture.

Villagers in Paghman, west of Kabul, recounted in the report how they patrolled their houses at night to deter armed robbers, many of them local policemen and soldiers loyal to Abdul Rabb al-Rasul Sayyaf, who is a member of the Northern Alliance. Often the robberies involved rape, but rape is so taboo that Human Rights Watch did not obtain firsthand accounts from any victims.

The report said much of the violence occurred because police and army officers in every district have developed a climate of impunity. Some violence, the report said, was driven by power struggles, ethnic rivalries and economics; police officers and soldiers often go unpaid for months.

One graphic account from a witness described how the Kabul police chief, a former mujahedeen commander named Basir Salangi, beat two detained students so violently that his own men had to restrain him.

The report also included an account of how the minister of education, Yunis Qanuni, a senior member of the Northern Alliance and a national security adviser, telephoned threats to the leader of a small political party that had published articles critical of the mujahedeen.

"I want you to revise your movement, your publication," the party leader quoted Mr. Qanuni as saying. When the party leader refused to comply, the report said, Mr. Qanuni threatened to come to his house. The party leader requested help from international peacekeepers.

Some abuses are committed by men loyal to people who have been politically sidelined but retain influence through commanders loyal to them, the report said.

But other culprits, the report said, hold important government positions and work closely with United States forces in the war against terrorists. Hazrat Ali, a commander in eastern

Afghanistan, for example, was criticized for allowing his commanders, including his own nephew, a police commander named Sami, to be involved in extortion on the roads, arbitrary detentions, beatings and holding people for ransom.

Copyright 2003 The New York Times Company