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Afghanistan villagers describe life under ISIL's rule

Weeks after ISIL-linked fighters are pushed back by Afghan forces in country's east, residents tell their stories.

3/23/2016

Weeks after the Afghan government claimed victory over ISIL-linked fighters in the country's east, local residents have described living in fear for almost a year under the rule of the armed group.

In early March, President Ashraf Ghani said Afghanistan would be a "graveyard" for the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant group (ISIL, also known as ISIS), as he announced that Afghan forces had dislodged fighters loyal to the group from regions of Nangarhar province bordering Pakistan.

According to officials and local residents, Afghan soldiers and local villagers teamed up to push the fighters back 8km and recapture 22 villages.

The ISIL loyalists had held some remote districts in the country's east for almost a year.



ISIL recruiting and brainwashing Afghan children

Locals told Al Jazeera that many schools were closed down while the fighters controlled the area and pupils were warned not to attempt attending classes.

One of the schools, Deserak High School in Achin district, was shut down and turned into the group's headquarters.

"They told us this school was part of the infidel, non-believers and they prevented us from learning," said pupil Ahmed Shinwari,.

Residents of Akhond Zadgan village said many Afghan soldiers were captured and beheaded, or shot, during the fight to take back control of the area.

One resident, Sabar Mira, told Al Jazeera that she lost two of her grandsons this way.

"They cut my grandson Ali to pieces and beheaded him. Hakim was shot dead. Now I have been left destroyed. These dogs killed both of them," she said.

Another villager, Said Amin, witnessed similar incidents.

"If they found an Afghan army soldier, they would behead him and then put the head on the stomach," he told Al Jazeera.

The fighters would leave a note saying the body had to be left on display for some time, and anybody who moved it would get the same punishment.

Not trusting the Afghan army to do enough to protect them, some villagers formed their own groups to protect the district.

"If the government stands with us, they [ISIL] will not be able to retake this area. But if they don't help us, they could take it tomorrow," Pir Mohammed, a village elder, told Al Jazeera.

John Campbell, the former US and NATO commander in Afghanistan, said earlier this month there were between 1,000 and 3,000 ISIL fighters in the country.

Some officials say most fighters calling themselves ISIL are disaffected Taliban members.

Last year, ISIL-claimed beheadings of a group of ethnic Hazara people prompted mass protests in the country.

Thousands of demonstrators took to the streets in the capital, Kabul, urging the government to take action against rising violence against Afghan civilians.