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Al Jazeera

Afghans dead in anti-ISAF protests

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At least five people have been killed in violent protests in the Afghan town of Taloqan, in the northern province of Takhar, officials said.

The provincial governor's spokesman told Al Jazeera that thirty were also wounded in demonstrations on Wednesday, against the killing of two men and two women by ISAF forces in a night-time raid.

A crowd of angry demonstrators armed with spades and axes took to the streets of Taloqan in protest, chanting "death to America", and "death to Karzai", and tried to storm a foreign military base nearby.

Police and Afghan security guards opened fire to disperse the crowd, which Takhar provincial police chief Noori estimated at 3,000 people, after the violence mounted.

"There is no more room in the hospital, it is already packed with wounded," Hassan Baseej, head of the provincial hospital, told Reuters news agency.

He also said most of the casualties had gunshot wounds.

"I strongly condemn this brutal act which only killed civilians," Noori told Reuters, adding that the dead were all Afghans.

He also said the raid was carried out based on false intelligence.

'Female fighters'

"This will only create distance between ordinary people, the government and its international partners," he said.

But according to the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), a joint force of Afghan and ISAF troops killed four fighters, including two armed females, while targeting a member of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan.

"A woman wearing a chest rack and armed with an AK-47 rifle attempted to engage the force. The security force gave numerous verbal warnings, but when the armed female pointed her weapon at them, she was subsequently killed," ISAF said in the statement.

"Shortly after, a woman armed with a pistol rushed out of the targeted compound and displayed hostile intent by pointing her pistol at the security force. The security force engaged the female resulting in her death," the statement added.

In male-dominated Afghanistan, female fighters are very rarely found among fighter ranks, and according to NATO, the few who have been identified are mostly foreigners.

A spokesman added he did not know the nationalities of the dead women.

Continued violence

Mahroof Shah, who lives close to the house which was raided by the troops, told Reuters that soldiers descended onto the house from four helicopters and started shooting.

"We were all very scared and children were screaming and crying," he said.

The incident comes a week after NATO troops killed three young Afghan civilians.

Foreign troops killed a 10-year-old girl and wounded four other children when responding to gunfire in eastern Kunar on Monday, the provincial governor said.

On Saturday, ISAF said its troops mistakenly killed a 15-year-old boy during an operation with Afghan forces to capture a Taliban fighter in eastern Nangarhar province.

ISAF also apologised for the death of a teenage woman and an Afghan policeman last Wednesday during a joint raid by Afghan and foreign troops on a compound in Nangarhar.