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Afghans call for bringing rights abusers to justice

By Abasin Zaheer

12/10/2011

A number of Afghans on Saturday demanded a public trial of human rights violators, saying that most of the abusers were holding high government positions.

"I want these human right violators tried; their punishment should be a lesson for others," said Ahmad Zia, a Kabul University student.

As International Human Rights Day was marked in the capital, Zia said the violators --most of them in high places -- could be tried and punished with the help of the international community.

Adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights -- a milestone in the conceptual evolution of how all humans should be treated -- was approved by the United Nations General Assembly on Dec. 10, 1948.

Around 1.5 million Afghans, most of them women and children have been killed and as many rendered disabled, wounded or missing since the Soviet invasion in 1979. Of the eight million Afghans who migrated to other countries, nearly four million have returned home.

Although the victims' relatives hope they would see justice in the form of the rights violators being punished, no practical steps have so far been taken in this direction.

In 2007, the National Assembly approved amnesty for warlords and others accused of war crimes. The move drew sharp criticism from human rights groups, the UN and some MPs, who insisted that perpetrators of rape, murder and other atrocities must be brought to justice.

Urging public trial of the human right abusers, Kabul-based shopkeeper Rahmatullah said: "None of the violators should be forgiven; they should be executed."

When asked who should punish the violators, he suggested the United Nations should be asked to bring them to justice.

But a retired army officer, Col. Ahmad Sher Khan, said as long as a democratically elected government was not in place, human rights violators would continue to be in positions of authority. "Over the past 10 years, the government has punished not even a single rights abuser; instead many have found their way to high positions."

Abdullah Sadaqat, a tribal elder from Laghman province, opined the government, the United Nations and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) could bring the violators to justice.

"I ask the government not to appoint human right violators to high positions. With the international community having a presence in the country, the government should prosecute the rights violators," said Shamal Khan, a resident of eastern Khost province.