

Afghan medical workers' strike called off

Our correspondent
14 March 2008

An indefinite strike by several hundred Afghan doctors and medical staff in the province of Herat was called off on Wednesday. According to the BBC, the medical workers called the strike last Saturday in protest against a recent rise in attacks on staff and their families.

Workers in shops and factories in the province also joined the strike to demand better security. The strike left the central hospital in Herat at a standstill and pharmacies and private clinics closed.

The Kabul-situated government of Hamid Karzai sent a delegation to Herat in an effort to deal with the crisis. On March 10, the government threatened the striking doctors with legal action if they failed to return to work.

The strike is believed to have been triggered by the kidnapping of the son of a local doctor in Herat last week. Kidnappers are reported to have demanded US\$300,000 (£149,000) for his release. It is the latest in a number of doctors or doctors' relatives to have been abducted over the past year. It is not clear who is behind the wave of kidnappings.

The doctors' strike reached far beyond Herat city itself—the city being an important regional centre to which many Afghans travel from surrounding districts and neighbouring provinces.

According to a recent United Nations report, there has been a sharp increase in militant attacks across the south and east of Afghanistan. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said there were 8,000 conflict-related deaths in 2007, at an average of 566 incidents per month. That compares with 425 incidents per month during the previous year. The report states that nearly a fifth of the 8,000 fatalities were civilians.

Increasingly, the Taliban and other militants are using Iraq-style insurgent tactics, including roadside attacks using improvised explosive devices, suicide bombs, assassinations and abductions.

The UN report noted the increased targeting of Afghan and foreign aid workers. Last year, at least 48 convoys of the UN's World Food Programme were estimated to have been attacked.

Meanwhile, more Afghans are being killed by occupation forces. Four Afghan civilians were killed this week in an airstrike in Helmand province involving British forces. The four bodies—two women and two children—and one injured person were found when troops inspected the area.

The Ministry of Defence said in a statement, "We can confirm UK forces were involved in an operation in the south of Helmand Province. This incident is currently under investigation and it would be inappropriate for us to comment."

Around 240 Afghans were killed in air strikes by foreign troops last year, according to the Afghanistan NGO Safety Office, a body that monitors security for non-governmental organisations. The same group reported that a total of 1,977 civilians died as a result of the Afghanistan occupation last year.

Prince Harry worked with the air support, the British Forward Air Controllers, until his recent "media-friendly" return from Afghanistan.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact