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Cold weather kills 17 including children in Afghanistan

January 22, 2013



At least 17 people, including 11 children, have died mostly from the cold in Afghanistan's displacement settlements in early January, highlighting the desperate and immediate need for improved aid delivery during the bitter cold winter months, Amnesty International said.

Polly Truscott, Amnesty International's Deputy Asia-Pacific Director said, "These deaths were a preventable tragedy that unfortunately shows the inadequate co-ordination of winter assistance to hundreds of thousands of people living in displacement camps across the country."

"The fact that children and the elderly are among the dead highlights the need to protect those groups that are most vulnerable to the harsh winter conditions. Priority must be given to those most at risk during the winter months, such as children, the elderly, people with disabilities and those needing medical care, including pregnant women."

The deaths occurred in the first two weeks of January in Kabul and Herat provinces, which host most of the country's half a million internally displaced people.

Last winter about 100 people, mostly children and the elderly, lost their lives in the camps and the Afghan government and international donors had been urged to prevent a repeat of the tragedy.

Decades of conflict have left Afghanistan with one of the highest internally displaced populations in the world, estimated to be 450,000, according to UNHCR- but the actual number is likely to be much higher.

The Afghan government is working on a much-needed comprehensive policy for IDPs that should recognize their protection and humanitarian needs, but efforts to assist and protect IDPs cannot wait – particularly over the winter.