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REUTERS

Afghanistan Says It Enacted Law to Pardon War Crimes

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KABUL, Afghanistan (Reuters) — Afghanistan confirmed for the first time publicly on Tuesday that it had enacted into law a blanket pardon for war crimes and human rights abuses that took place before 2001.

Human rights groups have expressed dismay that the law appeared to have been enacted quietly, granting blanket immunity to members of all armed factions for acts committed during decades of war before the fall of the Taliban.

President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan had promised not to sign the measure, known as the National Stability and Reconciliation Law, when it was passed by Parliament in 2007.

Human rights groups said they had learned only this year that the bill had been published in the country's official gazette, making it law.

A spokesman for Mr. Karzai, Waheed Omer, said Tuesday that the bill had become law because it was approved by two-thirds of the members of Parliament and therefore did not require the president's signature.

Parliament is made up largely of lawmakers who once belonged to armed groups, some of which have been accused of war crimes by human rights groups and individual Afghans.

It was the first time the palace had confirmed that the measure had become law.

Brad Adams, Asia director for [Human Rights Watch](#), said there was still a good deal of mystery surrounding the process. Among the questions is [why it took more than two years for news of the law's enactment to be made public](#).

“This law is absolute disgrace,” Mr. Adams said. “It’s a slap in the face to all the Afghans who suffered for years and years of war crimes and warlordism.”

He called on the United States and other nations to press Afghanistan to repeal the law.

“The U.S. needs to decide whether they’re with the victims or the perpetrators, and make their views known publicly,” Mr. Adams said.

During Mr. Karzai’s eight years in power, he has included former commanders of armed factions in his government and inner circle, including a number of former warlords who have been accused by the West of war crimes and other abuses.

Mr. Karzai’s two vice presidents are former leaders of armed groups whose factions squabbled for control of the capital, Kabul, in the 1990s, when thousands of civilians were killed and hundreds of thousands fled their homes.

Supporters of the amnesty law said that prosecuting old accusations would risk restarting years of civil war. But critics said that providing a blanket pardon for former warlords would allow them to retain their grip over Afghanistan’s economy and public life.