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Rights abuses by Afghan forces grow: Oxfam

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Foreign troops must do more to prevent growing rights abuses by Afghan forces including killings and child sex abuse as they prepare to hand over security, a leading charity warned Tuesday.

A report by Oxfam titled "No Time to Lose" called for greater checks and balances on Afghan forces before limited US troop withdrawals start in July ahead of a full drawdown expected by the end of 2014.

Oxfam said Afghan national police and troops were responsible for at least 10 percent of the 2,777 civilian deaths in Afghanistan in 2010, though the Taliban were to blame for most of the killings.

"As international military actors prepare for withdrawal, there are serious concerns regarding the professionalism and accountability of the security forces they will leave behind," said the report entitled "No Time To Lose."

"There is a serious risk that unless adequate accountability mechanisms are put in place, violations of human rights and humanitarian law will escalate -- and Afghan civilians will pay the price."

It said rights groups had also documented abuses including "night raids carried out without adequate precautions to protect civilians, the recruitment and sexual abuse of children, mistreatment during detention, and the killing and abuse of civilians by local police."

The report cited cases including security forces helping a soldier escape after killing an Afghan girl and police standing by "laughing and clapping" as women were lashed in public by local elders.

President Hamid Karzai announced in March that Afghan security forces will take over security from NATO this summer in the capital of violence-wracked Helmand province and several other areas.

It comes 10 years after the US-led invasion that ousted the Taliban regime in the wake of the September 11 attacks in 2001 and is the first step towards the withdrawal of foreign troops in the next three years.

But Oxfam said that until 2009 there had been a "striking lack of attention" to developing the quality of Afghanistan's security forces, who currently number around 118,000 police and 159,500 army personnel.

The report said there were no effective systems for citizens to lodge a complaint against the police and the army or to receive compensation.

It urged Kabul and the international community to properly vet recruits properly, to improve training and to discipline rights abusers.

It also urged them to increase the number of women in the force -- a rarity in conservative Afghanistan.

The question of a security handover has gained extra urgency since the killing of Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden in Pakistan on May 2, which has prompted some US lawmakers to urge an early pullout from Afghanistan.

But the United States and Britain have both said they will stay the course.