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Today date: **Dec 10, 2007**

## Helmand governor offers amnesty to Afghan Taliban

**Date :** Dec 09, 2007  
**Category :** General  
**Sources :** BNA

With a final push underway in a militant-held southern district of the insurgency-plagued Helmand province, a senior government official Saturday announced a general amnesty for Afghan militants in Musa Qala.

Many fighters are believed to have been eliminated in the operation that began a day earlier. The Coalition claimed killing a Taliban commander along with a number of supporters in attacks on their hideouts in the beleaguered area.

Also blown up were dumps of weapons belonging to the rebels, said the US-led forces without giving an exact number of the casualties inflicted on Taliban. The arms were destroyed in explosions, whose cause could not be ascertained immediately.

In an exclusive interview, Governor Asadullah Wafa asserted considerable progress made by Afghan and international forces during the five-day crackdown aimed at flushing the militants out of the restive town. Thousands of people are said to have fled hostilities in the area.

Wafa urged the miscreants to lay down their weapons so that displaced civilians could return to their homes and the operation was wrapped up soon. "We forgive all sons of the soil engaged in the Musa Qala fighting. If the Afghan Taliban lay down their weapons, we will guarantee their security."

In Kabul, the Defence Ministry confirmed the operation, led by Afghan troops, was launched on Friday to wrest back the control of Musa Qala from Taliban. A commander of the 208<sup>th</sup> Atal Military Corps, heading the sweep, said the soldiers were advancing on the district centre.

Gul Agha, a resident of the district, told this news agency: "Fierce fighting is going on. Foreign soldiers are conducting airstrikes on militant hideouts while ground troops are targeting the Taliban with heavy weapons."

Another dweller Abdul Ghafoor, speaking by phone, said about 10,000 families had moved from their houses to deserts. Some of them were living in tents and others under the open sky in the harsh Afghan winter, he continued. Food supplies have almost run out.

Meanwhile, a regional Taliban commander denied the fighters had suffered any fatalities in the clashes. Mullah Malang Jan, who leads the guerrillas in the shambolic town, said they had not yet seen foreign soldiers in Musa




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**EXCHANGE RATES**

	13:30	●
	50:10	👤
	99:20	👤
	67:90	👤
	13:60	👤
	53:50	●
	827	👤

Qala.

But Taliban spokesman Qari Yousaf Ahmadi confirmed the fighting. He said the movements men had destroyed two military vehicles of the foreign forces and all those on board were killed. The fighters were determined to defend their stronghold, he vowed, alleging the assault was aimed at aggravating the hardships of the citizens.

In an effort to retake Musa Qala, which has been under the control of the guerrillas for more than 10 months, NATO-backed Afghan forces launched the new operation on the periphery of the district, the western military alliance said on Saturday.

International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) personnel, assisting the Afghan army, launched an insertion of troops by helicopter on the edge of the militant-held district, NATO said. The operation would go on for the next few days, it added in a brief press statement.

Officials insisted the latest sweep was being conducted at a string of requests from tribal elders and ordinary residents to clear Musa Qala of more than 2500 armed fighters.

As the widely-expected offensive began, ground troops ringed the area and warplanes dropped bombs on what officials called entrenched rebel positions in Helmand - also known as Afghanistan's drug capital.

Of the ongoing push that has reportedly resulted in militant as well as civilian casualties, a NATO spokesperson said Coalition forces, including British, Danish and Estonian troops, were airlifted by helicopters to the rim of the restive district.

In a brief chat with reporters at the Kandahar Airfield, Wing Commander Antony McCord said the sweep would continue for some days. "The operation has got under way," the spokesperson added without offering further information about the military action.