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From: Abedin, Huma <AbedinH@state.gov>
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From: OpsNewsTicker
Sent: Friday, January 06, 2012 04:23 PM
To: NEWS-Mahogany
Subject: UN's Pillay: Yemen peace-deal amnesty may be unlawful (Reuters)

GENEVA (Reuters) - Granting amnesty to perpetrators of war crimes and human rights abuses under Yemen's presidential power transition deal would be against international law, the United Nations human rights chief said on Friday, undermining the peace agreement.

"I have been closely following the events in Yemen, particularly the very contentious debate about an amnesty law to be presented to Parliament shortly," U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay said in a statement.

Pillay has previously blamed Yemeni government forces for using live ammunition against unarmed protesters and has said President Ali Abdullah Saleh should not get amnesty in a deal to persuade him to leave power.

"International law and the U.N. policy are clear on the matter: amnesties are not permissible if they prevent the prosecution of individuals who may be criminally responsible for international crimes including war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide, and gross violations of human rights."

Rupert Colville, a spokesman for Pillay in Geneva, declined to elaborate further or say who might face which charges.

A source in the cabinet, which discussed the draft law this week, has said in its present form the amnesty would grant immunity widely to Saleh's aides and allies.

"Based on information we have gathered, there is reason to believe that some of these crimes were committed in Yemen during the period for which an amnesty is under consideration. Such an amnesty would be in violation of Yemen's international human rights obligations," Pillay said.

She also said any legislation must not discriminate between individuals who are pro-government or in opposition.

Saleh has repeatedly refused to accept deals brokered to encourage him to leave power after 33 years. As well as facing 11 months of "Arab Spring" protests that have pushed Yemen to the brink of civil war, his forces have been battling Islamic militants who have seized several towns.

The government says the militants are linked to al Qaeda's Yemen-based regional wing, which the United States and has called the most dangerous branch of the militant network. But his opponents have accused him of ceding territory to Islamists to bolster his assertion that his rule keeps al Qaeda in check.

Washington and oil giant Saudi Arabia fear uncertainty over Saleh's fate may push the country into chaos and help al Qaeda.

Saudi Arabia has supported Saleh by donating diesel and crude oil and the United States, which long backed Saleh as a pillar of its "counter-terrorism" strategy, helped craft the power transition deal giving him immunity from prosecution.

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