

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

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India: Armed groups in Jammu and Kashmir targeting civilians violate humanitarian standards

Amnesty International is concerned about attacks by armed groups in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir on civilians wishing to travel across the Line of Control. To use civilian lives in attempts to make political statements violates international standards of humanitarian law which clearly prohibit the targeted killing of civilians.

Amnesty International urges armed groups in Jammu and Kashmir to spare the lives of all civilians including those who wish to make use of the new bus link between India and Pakistan to be inaugurated on 7 April 2005.

The attack on the centre in Srinagar where passengers were staying prior to travelling on the first bus to Muzaffarabad in Azad Jammu and Kashmir is intended to undermine the ongoing dialogue between India and Pakistan, Amnesty International said today. While Amnesty International does not take a position on possible solutions to the issue of Kashmir, the organisation welcomes any moves that contribute to a climate in which human rights promotion and protection are more likely to be ensured.

On 6 April, a day before the planned opening of the bus link, members of armed groups threw hand grenades and set fire to the heavily guarded building in Srinagar where prospective bus passengers had gathered. A gun fight between security forces and the armed fighters then erupted. One of the armed fighters was reportedly killed and at least seven civilians were injured. A member of an armed group subsequently phoned news organisations claiming that four armed groups, the Al-Nasireen, Save Kashmir Movement, Al-Arifeen and Farzandan-e-Millat, had been responsible for the attack.

In a joint statement issued on 30 March, the four groups had warned people against entering the buses which would be their 'coffins' and told the bus drivers "not to play with their lives by driving these buses". On 5 April a bomb was defused on the Srinagar-Muzaffarabad highway but two hours later a landmine went off on another stretch of the same road, injuring seven people, mostly road workers.

The state government and Union government have meanwhile announced that the bus service would go ahead on schedule and be inaugurated by the Indian Prime Minister, Home Minister and Congress Party President Sonia Gandhi.

