

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

AI Index: ASA 20/008/2006 (Public)
News Service No: 058
9 March 2006

India: AI expresses concern over the safety of civilians, including adivasis, caught in escalating conflict in Chattisgarh

Amnesty International expresses grave concern about the recent escalation of violence in a remote forest region of Chattisgarh, central India. On 28 February, suspected Maoists belonging to the People's War Group (PWG) set off a landmine in the Dantewada/Bastar region of the state. As a result, a truck carrying civilians was blown up, killing 26 people and seriously injuring 30 others.

On 5 March, suspected Maoists also carried out raids on two other villages in the same Dantewada district, killing six persons and abducting five others. The PWG claims to seek rights for the marginalised communities.

Amnesty International has concerns over the safety of ordinary people including *adivasis* (indigenous communities) in this region, in the wake of the ongoing violent conflict between the PWG, and members of the *Salwa Judum*, a group whose stated purpose is to eradicate the PWG.

The victims of the 28 February landmine attack were on their way to a rally called by the *Salwa Judum*, or "Purification Campaign", established over a year ago.

In December 2005, the state government of Chattisgarh enacted new security legislation which could potentially grant it sweeping powers to greatly restrict the rights to freedom of expression and assembly.

Amnesty International urges the Chattisgarh government to investigate all killings of civilians in the region and amend the security legislation to ensure that the rights to freedom of expression and assembly are respected.

Background

Reliable sources have frequently stated that the *adivasi* communities in the region remain trapped in the violent conflict between both the security forces and the Maoists. They also allege that the *Salwa Judum* is a campaign supported by the state government in order to intimidate Maoist sympathizers and supporters.

Reports have also emerged that the *Salwa Judum* campaign, with a sizeable support base among the non-*adivasi* communities and political parties, is now mobilising *adivasi* youth against the Maoists. Some human rights activists allege that the *Salwa Judum* has been compelling them to attend their rallies.

While those participating in the *Salwa Judum* appear to be targeted by the Maoists, those unwilling to do so risked attacks by the state police and the Naga battalion of the paramilitary Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF). Reports indicate that a substantial number of *adivasis* remain confined to temporary camps

where they cannot fully support themselves and their families.

Sources also state that the government of Chattisgarh, while acknowledging the killings by the Maoists, is yet to investigate the deaths of those believed to have been killed by the *Salwa Judum*.