

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: ASA 31/002/2005 (Public)
News Service No: 004
20 January 2005

Embargo Date: 20 January 2005 00:01 GMT

Nepal: Illegal killings on the increase

The number of people who are being illegally killed in Nepal is increasing and those responsible are using more sophisticated tactics to hide their crimes, according to a new report by Amnesty International.

"Both the security forces and the Maoists are deliberately executing civilians and unarmed fighters" said Ingrid Massag, Asia Director at Amnesty International. "What is most chilling is that these killings are going completely unpunished, despite numerous promises by the government and Maoist leaders to uphold human rights."

The report, *Nepal: Killing with impunity*, gives details of many people who have been unlawfully killed by both sides to the conflict since the breakdown of a ceasefire in August 2003. It documents an increasing sophistication among security forces in hiding these abuses, including by burying bodies and forcing local people to sign false witness statements, as well as a continued reluctance to punish those responsible.

Even those responsible for the most serious and high-profile abuses, such as the illegal execution of 19 unarmed Maoists in Doramba village, Ramechhap district in August 2003, have not been brought to justice.

In another incident, on 3 September 2004 three unarmed teenage girls were allegedly killed by security forces. Hira Ram Rai, 15, Jina Rai, 16, and Indra Kala Rai, 16, were followed by a group of soldiers as they left their school in Basikhora village, Bhojpur district. When the girls went into a nearby forest, the soldiers shot them dead and buried them. Their killers have not been identified or punished.

Maoists have also been responsible for killing civilians and security force personnel that they have taken captive. Among the civilians killed was Dekendra Raj Thapa, a journalist and human rights defender abducted by the Maoists in June 2004 and killed by them on 11 August 2004. Maoist fighters responsible for such abuses are not disciplined and remain in their posts.

"These unlawful killings are part of a terrible spectrum of human rights abuses. The Nepali people are living amid daily torture, rape, 'disappearances' and arbitrary arrests," said Ms Massag.

Amnesty International is calling for a number of actions including:

The Nepali government and Maoists to keep their promises on human rights and discipline their personnel who commit abuses;
The Nepali government and Maoists to cooperate fully with the National Human Rights Commission, sign its Human Rights Accord and accept comprehensive monitoring;
The UN Commission on Human Rights, which meets in March, to appoint a Special Rapporteur dedicated to Nepal.

"International pressure can make a difference. Last year, it helped produce a drop in reports of 'disappearances' in Nepal. Now it is time the same level of attention is given to unlawful killings and other human rights abuses," said Ms Massage.

Background

Nepal has been gripped by a nine year conflict between Maoist insurgents and government forces. Since the breakdown of the most recent ceasefire between the government and Maoists on 27 August 2003, fighting has intensified and the human rights situation has deteriorated dramatically. Human rights defenders have come under increasing threat and the work of the National Human Rights Commission has been obstructed by both sides.

Amnesty International has consistently condemned the illegal killings carried out by both parties to the conflict. It has appealed to the government to abide by its international human rights obligations, including to uphold the right to life. It has also urged the Maoists to respect their stated commitments to fundamental human rights standards and the Geneva Conventions, which prohibit the execution of civilians and those not actively engaged in combat.

The National Human Rights Commission has developed a Human Rights Accord that will commit both the government and Maoists to uphold human rights and accept comprehensive monitoring. Amnesty International urges both parties to sign this agreement, as a vital step for the protection of human rights in Nepal.

For a copy of the report *Nepal: Killing with impunity* please see:
<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engasa310012005>

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