

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## India/Kashmir: Safeguard the lives of civilians

Amnesty International today condemned the unlawful killing by unidentified gunmen of 24 civilians in Nadimarg village in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. The dead included 11 women and two children and were all members of the Kashmiri Pandit community.

According to reports, around midnight on 23 March, approximate 15 men wearing army fatigues and carrying automatic weapons disarmed police officers at a nearby police station before ordering villagers out of their homes. When the villagers were gathered outside, the armed men fired on them indiscriminately killing 24 people before escaping into nearby forest. So far no one has claimed responsibility for the killings. This comes in the wake of the Government of Jammu and Kashmir's calling on the Pandit community to return to the Kashmir Valley after a decade and its attempts to restore the rule of law across the state.

"All sides must safeguard the lives of civilians in Jammu and Kashmir," Amnesty International said.

"International humanitarian law prohibits deliberate attacks on civilians and those not taking direct part in hostilities. It is as yet unclear who is responsible, but we wholeheartedly condemn this attack."

"The killing of innocent civilians should never be used to score a political point or undermine a political process," the international human rights organization continued.

Amnesty International urged the authorities to take measures to prevent further abuses against civilians and to ensure that the killings in Nadimarg are comprehensively and transparently investigated with a view to identifying the perpetrators and holding them to account.

"In the past, all too often the unlawful killing of civilians were left uninvestigated and those responsible remain punished," Amnesty International said.

As an example, the organization referred to the massacre at Chitthisinghpura in which 36 Sikh civilians were deliberately killed in March 2000, which has still not been subjected to scrutiny.

### Background

An early consequence of the rise of militancy in Jammu and Kashmir was the migration of large numbers of the Hindu Pandit community from the Kashmir Valley. The Pandits were regarded by some as having

strong links to the rest of India because they were Hindu and because they held a large percentage of government posts. Sections of the press called for the community to leave the Valley and anti-Pandit demonstrations took place in Srinagar. Several prominent members of the Pandit community, such as leading academics, were allegedly killed by militants.

In 1991 about 150,000 Kashmiri Pandits migrated from the Kashmir Valley. Those who were wealthy or had relatives in New Delhi moved there while the rest were relocated in camps around Jammu and New Delhi. A decade later, thousands of the migrants still live in camps around Jammu. According to government figures in April 2001, about 32,000 Kashmiri migrant families have been registered with relief organizations.

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

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