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Public Statement

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India: Excessive use of force against peaceful demonstrators in Narmada river valley

Amnesty International is gravely concerned by reports of excessive use of force by police officials during a peaceful demonstration on 17 December 2005 in Badwani, Madhya Pradesh state, central India, and calls on the Madhya Pradesh government to immediately set up an independent inquiry into this incident.

Hundreds of people from Madhya Pradesh and the neighbouring state of Gujarat were demonstrating in relation to the ongoing Sardar Sarovar dam project across Narmada river. The demonstrators were concerned that their right to compensation in the form of land following their recent displacement was not going to be upheld. According to orders by the Supreme Court in October 2000 and March 2005, the displaced farmers should be provided with cultivable land in lieu of their former land. There were fears, however, that those displaced would be provided only with financial compensation.

Following calls by the demonstrators to meet with the state District Collector, Mr Viswa Mohan Upadhyaya, members of the police forces reportedly used baton sticks against the demonstrators. It is reported that twenty people, including five women, were injured and brought to the hospital for treatment following the incident. A 13-year-old boy, Suren Jagan, from Avalda village, Madhya Pradesh state, sustained multiple fracture injuries in his hand.

Amnesty International is concerned by this incident and urges the Madhya Pradesh government to ensure that the right to peaceful assembly is upheld and that the police, when fulfilling their public order duties, respect human rights and use force only when strictly necessary and in a proportionate manner. The organization also calls on the government to ensure that the Supreme Court orders are respected and that the rights of those displaced are upheld in full.

Background

The demonstrators were affiliated to Narmada Bachao Andolan, an environmental social movement, who has campaigned for the last two decades against the social and environmental consequences of large scale dams which have been developed as part of the Narmada River Valley Development plan.

Narmada is the fifth largest river in India and flows west over a length of 1,312 km before draining into the Gulf of Cambay in Gujarat. The Narmada River Valley Development plan is a twenty year multipurpose power and irrigation project, consisting of 30 dams including two large scale dams, which has been implemented by the states of Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Rajasthan.

