

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

PRESS RELEASE

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India/Pakistan: Civilians continue to bear the brunt of Jammu and Kashmir conflict

Amnesty International today appealed to all sides of the conflict in Jammu and Kashmir to give priority to human rights and take decisive action to ensure civilians are protected.

"For too long human rights have been considered subordinate to political considerations in Jammu and Kashmir. Ordinary people have had to bear the brunt of political actors wishing to score a point. We appeal to all sides that this time, commitment to human rights protection should override such concerns and play a key role in efforts to find a political solution to decades of strife in the region," the organization said.

"While the threat of nuclear war has drawn the attention of the international community to the conflict, human rights of the people of Kashmir continues to be ignored ."

Since 1989 indiscriminate violence is widespread in Jammu and Kashmir and civilians are killed on a daily basis. During 2001, around 1200 civilians, including many children, were killed as a direct result of the conflict. The current escalation of violence continues to have a grave impact on the civilian population.

Hundreds of cases of torture, deaths in custody, extrajudicial executions and "disappearances" are reported every year. In most cases no one is held to account for such human rights violations, as law enforcement personnel intimidate complainants; members of the criminal justice system fail to ensure redress; and state agencies ignore court orders.

Civilians have also suffered abuses- including torture and killings- at the hands of armed groups who have not differentiated between civilians and military targets.

Both India and Pakistan have frequently used the tension in Kashmir to further their own political agendas and to deflect attention from the serious human rights violations in their own countries.

Amnesty International has repeatedly called on India, Pakistan and armed groups party to the conflict to respect international humanitarian law that prohibits deliberate or indiscriminate attacks on civilians and those not taking direct part in hostilities.

"Regional security will prevail only when the human rights of civilians are respected," Amnesty International said.

Background

Jammu and Kashmir is one of the most militarised regions in the world and ordinarily has around 700,000 security forces stationed there (now said to be up to million). In 12 years of conflict, 34,000 people have been killed, thousands of whom were civilians. Human rights abuses by Indian and

Pakistan security forces,including cross border shelling by both Indian and Pakistani armed forces ,and by armed opposition groups have remained at high levels throughout the decade.

Public Document

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