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India: Armed groups in Jammu and Kashmir must cease targeting civilians

Members of armed groups in Jammu and Kashmir must immediately cease attacks that directly or indiscriminately cause casualties among the general population. Such attacks demonstrate contempt for the fundamental principles of humanity said Amnesty International.

Local journalists and civil society groups have told Amnesty International that the number of civilian deaths seems to have increased since the beginning of 2013.

On 19 March, an 18 year-old man, Suhail Ahmad Sofi, a resident of Sopore in northern Kashmir was shot dead by two unidentified gunmen. According to eyewitnesses and local journalists, Suhail Ahmad Sofi was sitting with a friend near a local mosque when the gunmen opened fire on them.

The Jammu and Kashmir police said that Suhail took shelter in the mosque, but one of the gunmen pursued him inside and shot him five times, killing him instantly. The police have claimed the gunmen could be members of Lashkar-e-Taiba, an armed group active in Kashmir. The group has neither confirmed nor denied involvement in the attack, and no arrests have been made yet.

Armed groups have targeted members of the general population in Jammu and Kashmir on several occasions in 2013. On 9 March, unidentified gunmen, apparently belonging to an armed group, killed one man - Bashir Ahmad Gania - in Tangmarg, Baramulla district. On 13 March, another three people were killed when members of an unidentified armed group attacked security forces in downtown Srinagar.

Sarpanches, or local government officials, have also been targeted. On 24 February, suspected members of an armed group killed Javed Ahmed Wani, a *sarpanch* in Kreeri in Baramulla district. On 12 January, Zoon Begum, a woman *sarpanch*, was wounded in an attack by suspected members of an armed group. A day earlier, on 11 January, *sarpanch* Habibullah Mir was killed in Sopore in Baramulla district.

Amnesty International has steadfastly opposed both human rights abuses committed by armed groups and human rights violations committed by security forces and the police in Jammu and Kashmir. The authorities must investigate all human rights violations and abuses promptly, effectively and transparently and bring the perpetrators to justice in proceedings that meet international fair trial standards.

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