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India: Call for restraint in Kashmir

Amnesty International today condemned the car bomb attack by an unknown armed group in Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir's summer capital on 1 October. At least 36 people, including civilians, were killed.

"In this period of heightened tension around the world all sides to the conflict in Jammu and Kashmir must exercise restraint and respect the human rights of civilians," the organization said.

The organization urged all sides of the conflict to respect the rules of international humanitarian law that prohibit deliberate or indiscriminate attacks on civilians and those not taking direct part in hostilities. These rules also place obligations on armed groups to avoid such attacks.

"The population of Jammu and Kashmir should not be used as pawns and put at risk by political or other parties to make political gain," Amnesty International said. "Commitment to human rights protection should override political concerns and peaceful means should be sought to end the decades of strife in the region."

The organization is urging the central and state governments to ensure that an official enquiry is carried out into this and all abuses of human rights and that those responsible be brought to justice.

"In the past, perpetrators of human rights abuses have not been made to face the judicial consequences for their crimes. The impunity with which the human rights of the population are disregarded serves only to encourage the perpetration of more abuses," Amnesty International said.

Background:

The population of Jammu and Kashmir has been subjected to a high level of violence for over a decade. Since 1989 approximately 34,000 people, including

thousands of civilians, have reportedly died in the context of the conflict between militants seeking either independence or accession to Pakistan, and Indian security forces and police. Since the beginning of 2001 alone, around 2,500 conflict-related deaths have been reported in the state, over 850 of which were civilians.

Jaish-e-Muhammad, a militant Islamist group, initially claimed responsibility for the attack but later retracted. As yet no other group or party has admitted being involved.

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