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Nepal: Police shoot in cold blood as 'Maoists are flushed out'

The Nepalese Government should act now to ensure its police force stops the murder, torture, "disappearance" and the arbitrary detention of suspected members of the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) (Maoist), Amnesty International said today.

"Police have shot civilians in cold-blood –in the name of 'flushing out' armed members of the CPN (Maoist) from their jungle hide-outs –while enjoying absolute impunity," the organization said. "It is crucial that the Government of Nepal brings those responsible to justice. This would send a clear message to its police force that these grave violations will not be tolerated."

Amnesty International also asked to visit the country to investigate the deteriorating human rights situation which has reached alarming levels –mainly in the Mid-Western region of Nepal.

The police operation, reportedly started on 26 May, is apparently aimed at armed activists of the CPN (Maoist), who have been waging a "people's war" since February 1996. However, many civilians have been among those killed and police seem to have resorted to deliberate killings of armed members of the CPN (Maoist) as an alternative to their arrest.

Members of the CPN (Maoist) have also been responsible for deliberate killings of people they consider to be enemies of the "people's war" (including members of mainstream political parties) and other grave human rights abuses.

"Of course the government should be able to secure law and order in Nepal," Amnesty International said. "However, if there is evidence of people being responsible for communal activities, then they should be arrested, charged and brought to trial, not tortured or deliberately killed."

Amnesty International has received reports that the police have unlawfully killed at least 36 men and women, including civilians, in the following districts: Rolpa (eight), Jajarkot (12), Salyan (seven), Dang (four), Sindhupalchok (two), Gorkha (two) and Tanahu (one).

In one incident reported from Sakla, Jajarkot district, on 6 June, as many as nine civilians were killed during a religious festival which was running throughout the night at the local school. At around 5am, a group of around 45 policemen reportedly surrounded the area and started shooting randomly at people dancing in the compound. Among those killed were two women, a teacher and a health worker.

The bodies of those killed were allegedly disposed of by the police on the spot by burning them in a toilet pit. A fact-finding mission by a group of local human rights organizations was told by the local authorities that the police operations were being directed from the capital and that they were not able to comment.

Police authorities in Kathmandu admitted at a press conference on 16 June that 44 people have been killed but alleged that they were members of the CPN (Maoist) who were engaged in armed opposition and were killed during armed confrontations with the police. They deny that any civilians were among those killed by the police.

There have also been several reports of “disappearances”. Among those currently remaining unaccounted for are Mohan Prasad Oli, a teacher from Dhakeri, Mahatepuri village, Banke district, who was taken away from his home on 12 June by seven or eight police commandos travelling in a white van. In addition, Lal Bahadur Puna and Hari Narayan Shah, two people who were badly injured in the shooting at Sakla, and later seen being taken away by helicopter, remain unaccounted for.

Background

The CPN (Maoist), which is ideologically close to the Communist Party of Peru (Shining Path), has reportedly been responsible for the deliberate killing of civilians, including members of mainstream political parties, particularly the Nepal Congress Party. There have also been reports of harassment of human rights activists both by the police and the CPN (Maoist).

On 14 June, Gopal Siwakoti Chintan –a well-known human rights activist and Executive Director of the International Institute for Human Rights, Environment and Development (INHURED) and Secretary General of the Nepal Concern Society, another non-governmental organization –was arrested by police from the office of the latter organization. The police officers also confiscated audio and video cassettes of interviews conducted with victims of human rights violations and of seminars organized by the Nepal Concern Society.

Gopal Siwakoti Chintan was detained under the Anti-State Crimes and Penalties Act, 1989 until 24 June, when the court released him due to lack of evidence. Police are however continuing their investigations and Gopal Siwakoti Chintan has been informed that he may be called for further inquiry.

Earlier this year, on 26 February, Hem Raj Khatri Chhetri, village development chairman of Tharmare village, Salyan district, was killed together with two others when they verbally contested the police's intervention to disperse a public event. They were beaten and then shot in cold blood. An appeal to the then government to establish a thorough, independent and impartial investigation into these killings remains unanswered.

Several human rights activists in the Mid-Western region have also complained of intimidation by the CPN (Maoist). Apparently, they have been pressurized by members of the CPN (Maoist) not to report human rights abuses committed by its members.

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