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**NEPAL: THE GOVERNMENT AND THE COMMUNIST PARTY MUST FULLY RESPECT THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF CANDIDATES AND VOTERS**

In the run-up to local elections in the west of Nepal, scheduled for 17 May, Amnesty International is calling upon the government and the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN - Maoist) -- an armed opposition group boycotting the elections -- to fully respect the human rights of candidates and voters.

"The human rights situation in the Mid-Western Region -- particularly in the Rolpa and Rukum districts -- is progressively deteriorating," Amnesty International said. "Since the start of the election campaign, our organization has been monitoring reports of deliberate killings and hostage-taking of prospective candidates by armed activists of the CPN (Maoist), as well as cases of arbitrary arrest and ill-treatment by the police."

Victims of the CPN (Maoist) have included local politicians of the Nepali Congress Party and other mainstream political parties. Those reportedly arrested and ill-treated by the police include villagers suspected of being sympathisers of the CPN (Maoist).

"Hostage-taking, torture and deliberate killing are clearly prohibited under humanitarian law", Amnesty International said. "We urgently call upon the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) to desist from those practices."

On 12 March, the government appointed an 11-member advisory committee to recommend measures aimed at bringing human rights violations to a halt -- including those occurring in the context of the "people's war" declared by the CPN (Maoist) in 1996. The committee is due to report within three months.

Amnesty International has written to Prime Minister Lokendra Bahadur Chand asking for clarification about the role of the advisory committee, particularly on how its work would relate to that of the National Human Rights Commission -- which despite an Act of Parliament passed in November last year has still not been established.

"In any event, the Nepalese government should bring to a halt human rights violations such as torture and arbitrary arrest, which continue to be reported," Amnesty International said. "The apparent restraint in the use of firearms shown recently by the police is an encouraging sign, since there has been past evidence of police officers using lethal force in situations where it was clearly unjustified, or as an alternative to arrest."

The organization says it has recently not received reports of such nature and urges that all necessary measures are taken to keep it that way, especially in the context of the election campaign.

**Background**

The CPN (Maoist) declared a “people’s war” in February 1996. Since then, the human rights situation in Nepal has deteriorated gravely. When the government of Prime Minister Lokendra Bahadur Chand took office in March 1997, Amnesty International welcomed its stated commitment to stop human rights violations, including those that had occurred in the context of the “people’s war”.

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**For further information or to arrange an interview, please call the Amnesty International press office on 44 171 413 5566**