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India: Time to repeal the Armed Forces Special Powers Act

Amnesty International is seriously concerned that, two years after widespread protests against India's Armed Forces Special Powers Act (1958) (AFSPA), the Government of India is yet to repeal this controversial law.

Exactly two years ago, 32-year-old Thangjam Manorama Devi of India's north-eastern state of Manipur was sexually assaulted and extra-judicially executed, allegedly by soldiers from the Assam Rifles Regiment. These shocking events sparked widespread demonstrations in Manipur against the AFSPA and its effects.

The 48-year-old AFSPA, which grants special impunity powers to India's security forces, has long been in force in a number of areas affected by armed insurgencies, including the north-eastern states of Manipur, Assam and Nagaland, as well as Jammu and Kashmir.

Amnesty International has continuing concerns about the AFSPA and related breaches of international standards. The organisation detailed these in a 2005 Briefing.*

Following the protests in Manipur, the Government of India constituted a five-member panel led by former chairperson of the Law Commission, Justice B. P. Jeevan Reddy, to review the AFSPA's provisions. This panel submitted its report in June last year and its members were unanimous in their key recommendation - the repeal of AFSPA.

However, the Government of India is yet to act on this panel recommendation. It is also yet to make public an inquiry commission's report into the alleged extra-judicial execution of Manorama Devi, despite a Guwahati high court directive.

Amnesty International fully supports the recommendation to repeal the AFSPA and notes, with concern, the recent statement by India's defence minister Pranab Mukherjee that the Indian security forces would not be able to function without the AFSPA.

The organization continues to call for swift repeal of the AFSPA.

*India: Briefing on the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1958 (ASA 20/0135/2005).
<http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGASA200252005?open&of=ENG-IND>

