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Nepal: Maoists must stop targeting civilians

Amnesty International condemns the spate of violent attacks against local politicians and candidates standing for office in municipal elections due to be held on 8 February. One mayoral candidate has been killed, another was shot and injured and one district-level politician was reportedly abducted.

The attacks are believed to have been carried out by members of the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) (Maoist), which has launched a series of attacks in the run-up to the elections and threatened to take “special action” against election workers and candidates in an attempt to disrupt the polls.

Amnesty International calls on the CPN (Maoist) to end all violent attacks on civilians. The organization urges the CPN (Maoist) leadership to state publicly and unequivocally that it is against the Party’s policy to target civilians, including election candidates, and to instruct its cadres accordingly. Amnesty International also calls on the CPN (Maoist) to remove from their posts any cadres responsible for human rights abuses.

Amnesty International recalls that the CPN (Maoist) has pledged to respect human rights and observe international humanitarian law, which prohibits attacks against civilians.

Recent attacks against election candidates and other local politicians include the following:

On 22 January, two gunmen shot and killed Bijay Lal Das, aged 47, chairman of the Nepal Sadbhavana Party and a mayoral candidate in Janakpur municipality, Dhanusha district. The CPN (Maoist) claimed responsibility for the killing, according to the national newspaper Kantipur.

On 23 January, the home of Krishna Kharel, a local leader of the Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) in Nepalgunj, Banke district, was reportedly hit by a socket bomb attack. The attack was suspected to have come in response to rumours that Krishna Kharel intended to run for mayor in the upcoming elections. No injuries were reported.

On 25 January, Ram Kumar Tharu, aged 50, Bardiya district committee member of the Nepal Sadbhavana Party, was abducted by suspected Maoists from his home in Gulariya municipality, Bardiya district.

On 30 January, two unidentified youths shot and injured Dil Bahadur Rai, a mayoral candidate of the Rastriya Janmukti Party in Manbhavan, Lalitpur district. Police suspect Maoist involvement in the shooting.

Also on 30 January, suspected Maoists set fire to a house and a cowshed belonging to Prajapati Joshi, an unopposed candidate for ward chairman in Mahendranagar municipality (ward-7) in Kanchanpur district. Fighters reportedly asked inhabitants to leave the house before they set it ablaze and no injuries were reported.

The municipal elections are also being boycotted by an alliance of seven major political parties. Hundreds of political leaders and activists have been arrested over the past week for participating in demonstrations

against the continuing rule of King Gyanendra, who dismissed the government and seized direct power on 1 February 2005. Amnesty International is calling for the prompt and unconditional release of all political prisoners and urging the government to abide by its international human rights obligations.