

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

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Nepal: Amnesty International seeks guarantees for the safety of security forces personnel captured by the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) (Maoist)

Following a large scale attack by armed members of the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) (Maoist) on the district headquarters of Bhojpur in eastern Nepal on 2 March, several security forces personnel have reportedly been captured and taken prisoner.

Among those reported to be missing are two army personnel, Sujan Shrestha and Gopi Ram Shrestha, and several policemen from the Bhojpur District Police Office (DPO), including Sub-Inspector Nahakul Bhattarai, Assistant Sub-Inspector Krishna Prasad Sapkota, Head Constable Rajendra K C, constables Ramesh B K, Prabin Kumar Thakur and Bashudev Nepal, and a civilian working at the telecommunications office, Narayan Singh. Their whereabouts remain unknown.

"Those reported missing are believed to have been captured by members of the CPN (Maoist) after the attack," said Amnesty International. "If this is so, we urge that their relatives be informed of their whereabouts immediately and receive guarantees of their safety and security."

"We also urge that the captives should be treated humanely and that the conditions in which they are held do not amount to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment."

"We are appealing to the CPN (Maoist) to uphold minimum humanitarian standards as contained in Article 3, common to the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 which prohibits violence to life and person, the taking of hostages and the summary executions of those not actively engaged in the conflict, including those placed *hors de combat* by detention."

Background

In one of the fiercest clashes between government security forces and armed members of the CPN (Maoist) since the cease-fire broke down in August 2003, up to 2,000 armed Maoists attacked a telecommunications tower and tried to rob a state-run bank in the district headquarters of Bhojpur, eastern region on 2 March. The tower and the district administration office were completely destroyed. Over sixty security forces personnel and Maoists are reported to have died in the fighting although the actual toll may be much higher.

During a two week visit to Nepal in late January and early February, Amnesty International met with government authorities and raised its concerns about reports of an escalation of human rights abuses by both sides to the conflict.

The organization made public twenty steps - which if implemented by both the government and the CPN (Maoist) - could significantly improve the human rights situation. In particular, it urged both sides to the conflict to sign the Human Rights Accord, which would provide for the establishment of regional offices of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), with technical assistance provided by the United Nations (UN).