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India: Jammu and Kashmir Government Must Uphold Promises to End Human Rights Abuses

One year after the publication of a government plan, the Common Minimum Program, which promised to end human rights violations in Jammu and Kashmir, Amnesty International urges the state government to abide by its commitments to restore the rule of law and protect the human rights of the population.

"Despite the promises made in the Program, security forces have reportedly been responsible for the killing of over 250 civilians in targeted and indiscriminate violence since the beginning of 2003", said Amnesty International in a letter sent Monday to the Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir. "We call on the state government to ensure the immediate and thorough implementation of the Common Minimum Program,"

While campaigning for the elections in September/October 2002, the People's Democratic Party - now part of the ruling coalition - promised to put an end to the high level of human rights violations that have been taking place since the emergence of the armed insurgency in 1989. Forty thousand people are believed to have died as a direct result of the conflict.

Soon after the elections, the newly formed coalition government pledged to confront and remedy the cycle of human rights violations in Jammu and Kashmir through the Common Minimum Program. The Program committed the government to, among other things, investigate all allegations of human rights violations, release many of those detained under preventive detention legislation and disband the Special Operations Group (SOG), a division of the police persistently accused of committing wide scale human rights abuses.

However, expectations of a new era of respect for the human rights of the Kashmiri population have been disappointed. Extrajudicial executions, "disappearances" and torture perpetrated by the security forces, including the SOG, continue to be reported on a regular basis. The government has also failed to uphold its commitments to release more than a handful of the scores of people who remain in preventive detention without charge or trial.

"Throughout the past year, the government has announced several probes into alleged human rights violations by security forces, but to date the investigations have rarely resulted in the prosecution of members of the security forces," said Amnesty International.

At the same time armed opposition groups continue to kill, torture, rape, and beat members of the civilian population. A reported 344 civilians have died as a result of either targeted or indiscriminate

attacks so far this year but hardly any of those responsible for these crimes have been brought to trial.

"The spirit and substance of the Common Minimum Program must be respected by all sides to the conflict if the human rights of the Kashmiri population are to be respected and effectively protected," said Amnesty International.

For more information, please see:

Open Letter to the Minister of Jammu and Kashmir on the Failed Promises of the Common Minimum Program <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/ASA20/033/2003>

Public Document

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

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