

## **Indo-Pakistan Summit: Plea to put human rights in Jammu and Kashmir firmly on the agenda**

*Ahead of the Indo-Pakistan Summit, to be held on July 14-16, Amnesty International is calling on the Indian Prime Minister and Pakistani President to prioritise human rights in Kashmir.*

*"All too often human rights have been considered subordinate to political considerations. Ordinary people have had to bear the brunt of political actors wishing to score a point. We appeal to all sides that this time, commitment to human rights protection should override such concerns and play a key role in efforts to find a political solution to decades of strife in the region," the organization said.*

*Human rights abuses continue to be reported on both sides of the Line of Control. Currently, over 100 people are in arbitrary detention in Azad Jammu and Kashmir, the area under provisional Pakistani control.*

*The detentions followed demonstrations against the rejection of nomination papers of candidates attempting to stand in elections to the Azad Kashmir Assembly. The candidates had refused to support the state's accession to Pakistan. Amnesty International fears that these detainees may be subjected to torture and ill-treatment in custody.*

*In the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir, hundreds of cases of torture, deaths in custody, extrajudicial executions and "disappearances" are reported every year. In most cases no one is held to account for such human rights violations, as law enforcement personnel intimidate complainants; members of the criminal justice system fail to ensure redress; and state agencies ignore court orders.*

The special security laws which grant law enforcement personnel vast powers to arrest, also protect them from prosecution for acts "done in good faith". "Renegades", former militants who have joined the side of the government, have apparently been used to carry out abuses, including torture, abductions and killings, at the behest of state agencies.

Since 1989, 34,000 people have died as a result of the conflict and according to official sources at least 1,745 civilians have "disappeared". The real figure is probably much higher.

During an official ceasefire from November 2000 to June 2001, at least 535 civilians were indiscriminately killed in Jammu and Kashmir by militants and state agents. During the same period, state agents changed tactic and arrested fewer militants, shooting dead 587.

Civilians have also suffered abuses, including torture and killings, at the hands of armed groups who have failed to differentiate between civilians and legitimate targets. Observers believe that many of the militants are foreigners who have infiltrated the state to pursue objectives of other groups or states.

Exposed to harassment and abuses from state agencies and militant groups, ordinary people have had to bear a heavy burden. Medical experts report high levels of psychosomatic disorders, particularly among children, as a result of living in a climate of violence.

"During ceasefires or visits by foreign dignitaries in the past, civilians have been massacred in order to influence the process or its participants," Amnesty International said. "Amnesty International hopes that there will be no such grave violations at the time of the Summit and that there will be a genuine attempt to restore human rights for the people of Kashmir."

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