

UA 67/01

Fear for**INDIAMohammad Yousuf Sofi**

Political activist Mohammad Yousuf Sofi was arrested by police on 16 March. He is believed to be held at a police facility where detainees are frequently tortured and sometimes killed, the Special Operations Group (SOG) headquarters at the Airport Cargo Complex in Srinagar.

Mohammad Yousuf Sofi is a member of the political party *Jamat Islami*, which campaigns for Jammu and Kashmir to secede to Pakistan. He was arrested with a number of other political leaders when they attempted to join a protest march in Srinagar, organised after Hindu extremists publicly burned the Quran in New Delhi. Among the others arrested was Syed Ali Shah Geelani, a senior leader of *Jamat Islami* and the Huriyat Conference, an umbrella organisation of parties opposed to the Indian presence in Kashmir. On 17 March police took the detainees in a van to the home of Mr Geelani in Hyderpora. There a police officer ordered all of them to get out, except for Mohammad Yousuf Sofi, whom he said was involved in another case.

Mr Geelani protested and demanded that Mohammad Yousuf Sofi also be released. Journalists present say a police officer pushed Mr Geelani, who suffers from heart disease, out of the van, and he fell onto the road. Other police officers then beat him unconscious, some using rifle butts. The police then drove off in the van, with Mohammad Yousuf Sofi still inside.

Mr Geelani has since made a full recovery.

That evening a senior *Jamat Islami* lawyer, Mr Abdullah, asked police to let him see Mr Sofi, but was refused. On 18 March Mr Sofi's family tried to see him but were also refused.

Mr Sofi, who was formerly involved in the armed opposition to the Indian presence in Kashmir, was imprisoned between 1994 and 1996, and tortured. He has been working as a political activist for three years, and spent several months in preventive detention, with other political leaders from Jammu and Kashmir, after they called for a boycott of the September 1999 general election.

In response to public demonstrations against the beating of Mr Geelani and the detention of Mr Sofi, police released a statement on 19 March alleging that Mohammad Yousuf Sofi is involved in coordinating the activities of a militant group, *Hizbul Mujahadeen*.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

There are consistent and frequent reports of SOG involvement in human rights violations in Jammu and Kashmir, including rape, torture, deaths in custody, "disappearances" and extrajudicial executions. Between January and June 2000, Amnesty International documented 150 deaths in custody and extrajudicial executions, allegedly committed by the police, including the SOG, and the army. Many of the alleged deaths in custody reportedly took place after severe torture, but despite this the authorities often say that these deaths take place in encounters with militants or during escape bids.

Members of the police and security forces who perpetrate human rights violations operate with virtual impunity.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in English or your own language:

- urging the authorities to guarantee that Mohammad Yousuf Sofi will not be tortured or otherwise ill-treated in custody;
- urging them to give him prompt and regular access to his family, lawyers and any medical attention he may require;
- calling for him to be released immediately and unconditionally, unless he is charged with a recognisably criminal offence and brought before a court of law;
- urging the authorities to order a full, independent and impartial inquiry into the beating of Syed Ali Geelani at Hyderabad on 17 March 2001;
- calling on the government to immediately take all necessary measures, including the introduction of rigorous human rights training, to ensure that the SOG do not torture or ill-treat detainees.

APPEALS TO:

Dr Farooq Abdullah
Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir
Chief Minister's Office
Raj Bhavan
Jammu
Jammu and Kashmir
India

Fax: + 91 191 545649

Telegrams: Chief Minister, Srinagar, India

Salutation: Dear Chief Minister

Mr Ashok Suri
Director General of Police
Office of the DGP
Police Headquarters
Srinagar

Telegrams: Director General Police, Srinagar, India

Salutation: Dear Director General

COPIES TO:

Mr L K Advani
Minister of Home Affairs
Ministry of Home Affairs
Room No.104
North Block
New Delhi 110 001

Fax: + 91 11 3015750

Salutation: Dear Minister

and to diplomatic representatives of India accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 30 April 2001.