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India: Welcome steps to end impunity in Jammu and Kashmir

Amnesty International welcomed recent announcements to investigate a series of killings in Jammu and Kashmir as a first step toward ending years of widespread impunity.

On Tuesday October 31, Jammu and Kashmir's Chief Minister, Dr Farooq Abdullah, announced a judicial probe into the massacre of 35 Sikhs at Chittisinghpura on 20 March 2000 and the subsequent killing of five suspects, allegedly at the hands of the security forces, at Pathribal 10 days later.

The organization is encouraged by the government's acceptance of the report of the Pandian Commission into the police shooting of demonstrators at Brakhpura on 3 April 2000. The government's declared intention to prosecute those held responsible for the deaths of the Amarnath pilgrims in Pahalgam on 1 August 2000, including members of the security forces, is also a move in the right direction.

"Under international human rights law everyone has the right to legal redress for abuses suffered. These recent announcements offer a glimmer of hope that justice may be served," Amnesty International said.

During the last few months Amnesty International has brought many dozens of cases, including deaths in custody, extrajudicial executions and illegal detention, to the attention of the authorities, none of which have been subject to impartial inquiry.

The failure of the Government to date to bring the perpetrators of human rights abuses to justice has resulted in a climate in which more and more human rights violations have been committed in the state.

In light of the recent announcements Amnesty International hopes that the Government of Jammu and Kashmir will now be willing to work with human rights organizations to reduce the level of violations currently taking place. The Indian Government should now reconsider the possibility of access to Jammu and Kashmir for human rights monitors.

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For more information: please see ASA 20/24/2000 (June 2000) on the Chithisinghpura massacre or the Open Letter to the Chief Minister ASA 20/42/2000 (August 2000), both at <http://www.amnesty.org>. Or call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566
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