

Nepal: Secretary General launches Campaign Against Torture

Amnesty International's Secretary General, Pierre Sané today launched a campaign against torture in Nepal. He called upon the government, political parties, the police, the National Human Rights Commission and non-governmental organizations to work together towards the abolition of torture.

"Torture is reported almost daily; however all of us have it in our power to put an end to this gross act of inhumanity," the Secretary General said.

Victims of torture include women and children; criminal suspects; people taken into custody in the context of local disputes over land or other private issues; and political detainees, particularly people arrested on suspicion of being members or sympathizers of the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) (Maoist). Although the large majority of torture allegations concern the police, other state agents such as forest guards or prison guards are also sometimes implicated. There is also strong evidence that members of the CPN (Maoist) have committed torture.

Those who want to stop torture in Nepal are not alone. Throughout the world Amnesty International's one million members will be challenging governments everywhere to commit themselves to combat torture and create "Torture Free Zones" in their areas of responsibility.

Here in Nepal the campaign will be highlighted by an east to west motorcycle rally covering more than 1000km. Amnesty International and non-governmental organizations will be visiting many police stations requesting officers-in-charge to declare their police station a "Torture Free Zone". Towards the end of the campaign in December 2001, they

will visit those places again to check whether the police have upheld that pledge. Children will be invited to participate in visits to police stations and write to the Home Minister about their impressions.

For the last three years, Amnesty International Nepal has been involved in training police officers in human rights protection to increase awareness that torture is illegal. The organization would like to see human rights integrated into the police force's own training program to help transform the service from a quasi-military force into a force that serves the community.

The recently established National Human Rights Commission has a key role to play in the fight against torture by monitoring the accountability of the police. Amnesty International is urging the government to ensure the Commission is able to function independently, is well resourced and receives full cooperation from the police and other institutions.

On 24 November, Amnesty International Nepal will be organizing a seminar to investigate how to make the Torture Compensation Act (1996) more effective. In the four years since it was introduced, not a single victim of torture has been granted compensation.

"More than ten years after torture was outlawed in the Constitution, torture is still a major human rights issue. It is time the government put words into action and rid the country of this unacceptable practice."

Amnesty International is calling on the government to ensure that torture is defined as a criminal offence punishable by law; that there is effective investigation and prosecution of alleged perpetrators; and that reparation for victims becomes a reality.

The organization is also calling on the CPN (Maoist) to immediately end the use of torture.

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

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW web : <http://www.amnesty.org>