

PUBLIC STATEMENT

INDIA:

Amnesty International campaigns against rape and sexual abuse by members of the security forces in Assam and Manipur

Amnesty International's membership is initiating today a campaign to register concern at reports of the rape and sexual abuse of women and children by security forces in the Indian states of Assam and Manipur.

Members of Amnesty International's specialist women and children's groups in 30 countries world-wide will be writing to the Central Government and state authorities in India calling on them to take immediate steps to prevent the sexual torture of women and children, to ensure that investigations are carried out, that those found responsible are prosecuted, and that the victims are provided with medical treatment, rehabilitation and compensation.

The cases highlighted in this campaign include children who have been sexually abused and raped by members of the armed forces in Manipur, and women who have been raped by members of the armed forces in both Assam and Manipur, for whom there has been inadequate redress.

While acknowledging that in some cases stern action has been taken to bring perpetrators of rape to justice in recent years, Amnesty International remains concerned at the high incidence of rape with impunity in the two states, and at the manner in which this grave human rights violation is being addressed by authorities.

Amnesty International believes that the impunity of offenders and the difficulties faced by victims in seeking redress are major contributory factors to the continuation of rape and sexual abuse throughout India.

In Assam and Manipur these difficulties are compounded by the existence of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act which not only gives the armed forces widespread powers to search the homes of civilians, but also grants members of the armed forces protection from prosecution.

Specialist women and children's group members will be reminding the authorities of commitments India has made in international human rights fora to review legislation facilitating impunity.

Five years ago, the Government of India committed under the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (adopted by the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights) to "*abrogate legislation leading to impunity for those responsible for grave violations of human rights ... and prosecute such violations thereby providing a firm basis for the rule of law.*"

It is now three years since the Government of India committed at the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women to review national legislation in order to ensure its effectiveness in eliminating violence against women, emphasize the prosecution of offenders, to adopt or strengthen laws to punish state agents who use violence against women, and to take effective action against such perpetrators.

In addition to judicial remedies for this violation, Amnesty International's women and children's specialist groups will be calling for the granting of full redress to victims, including adequate compensation, proper medical care and rehabilitation. Furthermore, Amnesty International groups are urging that full training be given to members of the security forces on their obligations under the international human rights standards to which the Government of India is party.

Background

Human rights abuses are a feature of daily life in Assam and Manipur, where armed opposition groups have long been active. Amnesty International has repeatedly raised concerns at reports of "disappearances", extra-judicial execution, and torture by government authorities in the context of security operations. The organization has also called on armed groups to adhere to the minimum standards of international humanitarian law, by calling a halt to the deliberate and arbitrary killing of civilians, torture, ill-treatment and hostage-taking.

Amnesty International regularly receives reports of rape and other forms of torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment by the police and members of the security forces in all regions of India. The organization has repeatedly raised these concerns with government officials.

It is now one year since the Government of India took the welcome step of signing the Convention Against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment adopted by the United Nations in 1984. In the year of the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights the Government could consolidate this first step toward providing full legal protection from torture, including rape, for all citizens of India, by ratifying the Convention at the earliest.

ENDS.../