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INDIA: DANGEROUS PRECEDENT IN HALTING INVESTIGATION INTO POLICE
KILLINGS

Amnesty International today called on the state government of Maharashtra to reverse its decision to halt an investigation into allegations of police involvement in killings in Bombay.

"By halting the inquiry at this late stage, after years of promises, the state government is sending a powerful message to police officers that whatever they do, they will not be held accountable," Amnesty International said. "This is a dangerous message to send at a time when reports of human rights violations by the police remain at a high level throughout the country."

The Srikrishna Commission of Inquiry was established on 25 January 1993 in response to *prima facie* evidence that police officers deliberately killed people during the riots in Bombay in December 1992 and January 1993. Evidence suggested police also participated in the violence and looting. An estimated 1,500 people were killed in those riots, which followed nationwide communal tension after the 6 December 1992 demolition of the Babri *Masjid* (mosque) in Ayodhya.

The Commission was set up to identify those responsible for the riots, report on the adequacy of preventive measures taken by the police, consider whether adequate steps were taken to control the riots, determine if the police firings were justified, and recommend measures to prevent recurring communal conflict of this nature.

On 23 January, almost three years to the day after it was set up, the Chief Minister of Maharashtra announced the decision to disband the Commission on the grounds that "it is not conducive to peace between Hindus and Muslims". In its three-year existence, the Commission never publicly reported any of its findings though recent reports suggest that the inquiry was about to reach a conclusion.

"The grounds given by the Chief Minister for disbanding the Commission ignore the grave nature of the violations which took place and the continuing need for a full investigation," Amnesty International said.

"It is the government's responsibility to ensure that police officers against whom charges had been made are brought to justice. This is especially important for the victims and their families, and to prevent police powers from being abused in the future."

After a visit to Bombay in 1994, Amnesty International expressed concern about the slow progress of the work of the Commission. In June 1995 the government of Maharashtra widened its scope to include an investigation into the period leading up to the bomb blasts which took place in Bombay in March 1993. The human rights organization wrote to the Chief Minister of Maharashtra, expressing concern that such a move would further delay the work of the Commission and undermine its effectiveness.

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