

AI INDEX: ASA 20/31/96

**EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE 4 JULY 1996**

INDIA: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CALLS FOR RELEASE OF FOREIGN HOSTAGES  
ON THE ANNIVERSARY OF THEIR CAPTURE

On the anniversary of the capture of five hostages by an armed opposition group in Jammu and Kashmir, Amnesty International today expressed its increasing concern for their safety and renewed its call for their release.

American Donald Hutchings, German Dirk Hasert, Norwegian Hans Christian Ostro and Britons Keith Mangan and Paul Wells were taken from Pahalgam area between 4 and 8 July 1995 while they were trekking in Jammu and Kashmir. Amnesty International condemned the subsequent killing of Hans Christian Ostro in August 1995.

Al Faran, an armed separatist group fighting for an independent Kashmir is believed to have abducted them, although they claim to no longer be holding the remaining hostages. Negotiations between the Indian government and Al Faran broke down last November.

“Whoever is now holding these hostages should release them immediately and unconditionally,” Amnesty International said. “The kidnapping of innocent people to gain political advantage can never be justified in any circumstances. To hold these four for a year in captivity is almost unbelievably callous.”

Amnesty International called on the captors to listen to the pleas of the hostages’ families -- who told the organization that “[Our] families have endured a long year of painful separation from our loved ones. We have heard reports of injury, illness and death. We know they must be suffering. They are merely innocent tourists. We appeal to their captors for their immediate and safe release.”

In the first weeks of June, Jammu and Kashmir authorities and foreign experts searched the area of Magamrakh, after a Kashmiri detainee claimed that the hostages had been shot dead and buried there on 19 December 1995. No evidence was found to substantiate this claim. Members of Indian security forces then claimed to have seen the hostages and their captors in May 1996, adding confusion to their fate and whereabouts.

ENDS.../