

AI Index: PRE 01/220/2010
01 July 2010

New Amnesty Chief calls on governments to respect rights of world's most vulnerable people

Salil Shetty, the new Secretary General of Amnesty International, today began his first full day in office by pledging to do all that he can to ensure governments respect the rights of the world's most impoverished and vulnerable groups.

"I am deeply privileged to have this opportunity to lead the movement in its fight to end repression and injustice," Salil Shetty said. "With traditional human rights challenges persisting and several new challenges confronting the world, the need for Amnesty International as a leading voice against human rights violations is greater than ever before."

A renowned expert on poverty and human rights, Salil Shetty stressed the urgency of ensuring governments place human rights at the centre of efforts to eradicate poverty. World leaders are due to meet at the United Nations in New York this September to review progress on the Millennium Development Goals, the UN's major global initiative to address poverty.

Salil Shetty praised the dedication of Amnesty International's 2.8 million supporters from across the world that campaign to protect human rights.

"Wherever I have travelled Amnesty International is held in the highest regard for its powerful grassroots base, high quality of research and incisive and effective campaigning," Salil Shetty said. "The solidarity and commitment of our supporters combined with the power of our analysis is a potent force in delivering change; as Amnesty has consistently shown over the decades."

Outlining his priorities, Salil Shetty said he intended to build on Amnesty's core strengths. He highlighted the need to further campaigns that strengthen accountability and bring to justice those responsible for human rights abuses.

Other areas for action include renewed efforts to end unlawful detention; abolish the death penalty; end discrimination and to protect the rights of migrants.

The new Secretary General emphasised the indivisibility of all rights and said there was a need to find new ways of connecting more systematically economic, social and cultural rights with civil and political rights.

For the past six years Salil Shetty was Director of the United Nation's Millennium Campaign, an anti-poverty campaign that calls for greater accountability from governments in the fight against hunger, disease and illiteracy. Through the Millennium Campaign, Shetty galvanised strong faith-based, civil society, media, private sector and local government support for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.