

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Nepal: A decade of suffering and abuse**

Ten years of war and political instability have turned the human rights situation in Nepal into one of the worst in the world -- and the international community has a critical role to play in reversing the decline, said Amnesty International today.

"The people of Nepal have lived through far too much violence already. Without urgent action from the international community and all parties in Nepal, a new generation will grow up knowing nothing but bloodshed and conflict," declared Irene Khan, Amnesty International's Secretary General.

There has been a sharp escalation of violence in recent weeks with police using excessive force against those protesting against municipal elections held on 8 February, which were widely seen as an attempt by the King to legitimise his rule. There are fears of further violence as the tenth anniversary of the war -- 13 February -- draws closer.

On top of widespread abuses of human rights related to the conflict, the government has restricted basic civil liberties over the last year, causing the situation to deteriorate further. In the last few weeks more than 1,500 people have been arrested for either organizing or participating in political demonstrations, according to reliable estimates. On 8 February one protester was shot dead by police.

More than 12,000 people have died since the Maoists declared a "people's war" on 13 February 1996. Hundreds more have 'disappeared', been tortured, abducted, raped or recruited as child soldiers. Hundreds of thousands of people have been forced to leave their homes behind to live in miserable conditions in temporary housing.

"Over a decade of conflict we have seen the human rights situation steadily worsen, with increasing numbers of civilian killings and injuries and, for a time, the highest number of reported 'disappearances' in the world," said Irene Khan, Amnesty International's Secretary General.

Amnesty International reiterated its call to the Nepali government to ensure its security forces are not allowed to get away with killings and other abuses. Perpetrators must be prosecuted and their victims allowed justice. The organization also called on the Maoists to take all possible measures to ensure that civilians are never harmed.

"The international community has a critical role to play in preventing further deterioration of the human rights situation," said Irene Khan. "They need to continue to pressure the government to respect human rights and to meet their obligations under international law -- including by restoring basic freedoms such as the right to peacefully demonstrate."

The international community should review Nepal's participation in peacekeeping operations abroad, given the Nepali Army's poor human rights record at home. Amnesty International reiterated its request of February 2005 and called on those foreign governments that continue to supply weapons to Nepal to impose an arms embargo until the human rights situation has significantly improved.

"It would be easy for this conflict to slip off the political agenda given how long it has been going on, but for the sake of the people of Nepal for whom it is a daily tragic reality, the world must remain engaged and keep up the pressure on the government and the Maoists," said Irene Khan.

### **Background**

Since King Gyanendra seized power on 1st February 2005, the bloody abuses associated with the conflict have been compounded with restrictions on civil liberties. Despite interventions from many parties -- including Amnesty International who met the King in February 2005 -- there have been attempts to silence the normally vibrant national media and human rights activists have been harassed and arrested.

In recent weeks hundreds of people have been arrested for either organising or taking part in political protests. The security forces have responded to the demonstrations with disproportionate violence. Many demonstrators report being beaten and on 8 February 2006 political activist Umesh Chandra Thapa was shot dead by security forces while returning from a demonstration in Dang district, mid-western Nepal.

This suppression of criticism has left a dangerous blind spot in terms of what the outside world, and even those within the country, know about the human rights abuses going on outside the capital.

For two years -- in 2003 and 2004 -- Nepal had the highest rate of reported 'disappearances' in the world. However, following significant international pressure reports of new 'disappearances' fell significantly in 2005.

In May 2005 the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) established a human rights monitoring mission in Nepal.

The last decade of conflict has also exacerbated the effects of the poverty faced by Nepal. Conflict, insecurity, and regular "strikes" called by the Maoists have prevented the already poor population from access to basic rights such as education, health services and food.

### **Notes to Editors**

Amnesty International's Secretary General Irene Khan will be visiting Delhi from 15 - 17 February and is available for interview on this issue.

To arrange an interview with her during these dates please contact:

**Judit Arenas in Delhi on +44 777 847 2188, or Saria Rees-Roberts in London on + 44 790 439 8285.**

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