

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

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Pakistan/India: Human rights must be central to response to massive earthquake

Amnesty International is greatly saddened by the devastating impact of Saturday's massive earthquake on areas in Pakistan and India. We wish to extend our condolences to the bereaved and sympathies to those still searching for their loved ones and to all those who have had their lives torn apart. According to current estimates the death toll may rise to over 30,000 people. Some 60,000 others are reportedly injured.

The organization wishes to express its solidarity with all those struggling to respond to the crisis. Past emergencies like the tsunami which hit South East and South Asia at the beginning of the year have pointed to the need to place human rights protection at the centre of the relief effort right from the start. This includes adherence to the principle of non-discrimination in aid provision and principles guiding protection of human rights in situations of internal displacement.

Amnesty International is calling on all those involved in the relief effort to respect international human rights norms. All assistance should be provided on the basis of need, without discrimination based on race, colour, sex, language, religion, political and other opinion, national and social origin, property, birth or other status of recipients. Amnesty International is calling particularly for the protection of those with specific needs, including children, people with disabilities and women in vulnerable situations. Thousands of the dead and injured are schoolchildren. Amnesty International remains greatly concerned about the welfare of the surviving children in the affected areas.

Human rights are most in jeopardy in situations of crisis and emergency. It is therefore crucial for governments and other agencies to recognize and support the central role of human rights defenders, including those engaged in humanitarian work and relief and reconstruction efforts.