

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

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Nepal: Amnesty International calls for release of hostages

Amnesty International is concerned about the sharp rise in reports of possible hostage taking and abductions by the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) (Maoist) in a number of separate incidents.

The organization is concerned about reports that over 30 security forces personnel and government officials may have been taken hostage by the CPN (Maoist) following a major attack on Beni Bazaar, the district headquarters of Myagdi, western region, on 20 March.

Among those missing are Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) Rana Bahadur Gautam and Chief District Officer (CDO) Sagar Mani Parajuli

In a statement issued to journalists on 22 March the leadership of the CPN (Maoist) reportedly said that DSP Rana Bahadur Gautam and CDO Sagar Mani Parajuli were in their custody, along with over 30 other security forces personnel and government officials. The CPN (Maoist) has demanded the release of three Maoist leaders - Matrika Prasad Yadav, Suresh Ale Magar, and Tilak Sharma - from army custody as a precondition for the release of all those held.

"If those detained are held solely in order to compel the government to release these Maoist leaders then Amnesty International would consider that they are being held as hostage and would call for their immediate and unconditional release."

"It was reported that on 22 March the CPN (Maoist) sent a communication to Kantipur Publications pledging to uphold minimum humanitarian standards as contained in article 3, common to the four Geneva Conventions of 1949," said Amnesty International. "However, international humanitarian law clearly prohibits the taking of hostages."

Police headquarters have confirmed that in the aftermath of the attack 50 police personnel remain missing and have not been accounted for. A spokesman for the Royal Nepal Army (RNA) stated that one soldier was missing and is thought to have been taken prisoner by the CPN (Maoist).

In a separate incident the organization is concerned about the reported abduction by the CPN (Maoist) of two members of the Communist Party of Nepal - United Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML) during a "March for Peace and Democracy" organized in Bajura district on 6 March. Those abducted were Tara Chandra Regmi, the Deputy Secretary of the District Committee, and Lal Bahadur Thapa, a District Committee member. Lal Bahadur Thapa was released within one week of the abduction, but the whereabouts of Tara Chandra Regmi remain unknown.

In a third incident on 20 March in Surkhet district, a group of 28 CPN-UML members were

reportedly abducted by members of the CPN (Maoist), whilst they were returning home from a "Campaign for Peace and Democracy" meeting in the Babiya Chaur area of the district. Among those abducted were Rishi Sharma, the CPN-UML District Committee Secretary, and Bal Krishna BC, the former Chairman of Surkhet District Development Committee. The whereabouts of all 28 remain unknown.

Amnesty International urges that the CPN-UML members who have been abducted should be released immediately and unconditionally.

"We additionally urge that all the above captives be allowed to communicate with their relatives and be given guarantees of their safety and security," said Amnesty International. "We also urge that they be treated humanely."

Background Information

In what is reported to be one of the largest clashes between government security forces and armed members of the CPN (Maoist) since the cease-fire broke down in August 2003, up to 2,000 armed Maoists attacked key government installations including the District Administration Office, District Police Office, the army barracks and two state owned banks in Beni Bazaar, the district headquarters of Myagdi, western region, on 20 March. Over 50 security forces personnel, 77 Maoists and 13 civilians are reported to have died in the fighting although the actual toll may be higher.