

**EXTERNAL (for general distribution)**

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**UA 218/92 Fear of "Disappearance"**

**30 June 1992**

**Bhutan**

**H B Sapkota**

Amnesty International has recently been made aware of the possible "disappearance" of H B Sapkota. He is a married man with five children who ran a cycle repair shop in Geylegphug, southern Bhutan. H B Sapkota was arrested on suspicion of involvement in "anti-national activities" in September 1990 but Amnesty International is not aware that he has been charged or tried. Since his arrest H B Sapkota's family have not been permitted to visit him and conflicting information concerning his current fate or whereabouts have given rise to concern that he may have died in custody, possibly as a result of torture or ill-treatment.

H B Sapkota was arrested on 4 September 1990 by Assam police from a house he was visiting in Dadghari, Assam, India. On the same day he was reportedly handed over to the Bhutan police. It is not clear where he was taken subsequently but two days later he is reported to have been transferred to Thimphu Central Jail. From there, one report says H B Sapkota was moved to a detention place at Gasa. During the whole period of his detention, his relatives were not allowed to visit him or correspond with him.

On 1 January 1992 H B Sapkota was seen being brought to Thimphu Hospital, wearing shackles and apparently in a very weak state. The cause of his weakness is not known to Amnesty International. The following morning a former prisoner saw that H B Sapkota's bed was empty. Hospital staff told this prisoner that H B Sapkota had died in the night.

In March 1992 the wife of H B Sapkota returned to Bhutan from Nepal, where she had been living in a refugee camp, to seek clarification of what had happened to her husband. She made inquiries at Dadmakha and Gaylegphug police stations. Officers at Dadmakha police station accepted from her a package of clothes for H B Sapkota. But on the next day they returned the package saying that he could not be traced. Mrs Sapkota then visited the police station in Gaylegphug where an officer confirmed that H B Sapkota was not being held there but agreed to inquire as to his whereabouts. Six days later, the officer told Mrs Sapkota that her husband was in good health and that she need not worry about him, but he did not tell her where he was being held. Mrs Sapkota also tried to make inquiries with the Chief of Police in Thimphu but was unable to meet him.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Amnesty International has become concerned since September 1990 about reports of human rights violations occurring in the south of Bhutan. These violations

have taken place in the context of protests by Nepali-speaking Bhutanese against the government's policy of national cultural integration on the basis of northern Bhutanese traditions and culture and the application of the 1985 Citizenship Act. Amnesty International has collected evidence of arbitrary arrests, ill-treatment and torture, particularly in the period after demonstrations in September 1990.

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Of particular concern with respect to the case of H B Sapkota, is the fact that Amnesty International has received information about several other prisoners who are reported to have died in detention during 1991, as a result of ill-treatment or torture or due to receiving either inadequate medical treatment or no treatment at all for illnesses contracted during imprisonment. Concern that prisoners are not always treated in accordance with international standards is heightened by the Bhutanese government's consistent refusal to reveal the places of detention in which prisoners are held.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send tlegrams/faxes and airmail letters:**

- expressing concern that H B Sapkota's relatives have not been informed of his fate or whereabouts since his detention in September 1990;
- urging the authorities to immediately seek to establish the whereabouts of H B Sapkota and asking that you be informed of the results of the investigation;
- seeking assurances that adequate medical treatment is available to all prisoners, in accordance with Article 22 of the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners.

**APPEALS TO**

1) His Excellency Lyonpo Dago Tsering  
Minister of Home Affairs  
Ministry of Home Affairs  
Tashichchodzong  
Thimphu  
Bhutan

**Salutation: Dear Minister**

**Telegrams: Home Affairs Minister Tsering, Thimphu, Bhutan**

2) Colonel Tandin Donji  
Chief of Royal Bhutan Police  
Royal Bhutan Police Headquarters  
Zhilnen Namgyelling  
Thimphu  
Bhutan

**Salutation: Dear Colonel**

**Telegrams: Royal Bhutan Police Chief Donji, Thimphu, Bhutan**

3) His Excellency Lyonpo Dawa Tsering  
Minister of Foreign Affairs and  
Secretary of the Council of Ministers  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
Tashichchodzong

**Salutation: Dear Minister**

Thimphu

Bhutan

**Telegrams: Foreign Affairs Minister Tsering, Thimphu, Bhutan**

**Faxes: + 975 22 459**

**COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:** diplomatic representatives of Bhutan

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat or your section office if sending appeals after 10 August 1992