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India: Equal protection to all citizens must be ensured in Gujarat

Amnesty International is deeply concerned about reports of widespread communal riots in the Indian state of Gujarat since 27 February in which nearly 250 people, a large number of whom appear to have been unarmed civilians, have reportedly been killed. The organization calls on law enforcement agencies to ensure equal protection to all citizens, and on all the parties involved to stop the cycle of violence and retribution.

The organization urged the Government of India and the Government of Gujarat to ensure that all law enforcement agencies deployed in the state, as well as in the rest of the country, strictly abide by the guidelines set by the international community for the conduct of law enforcement officials and the use of firearms.

“Law enforcement must be exercised by security agencies with the aim of protecting human dignity, irrespective of the religious identity or political beliefs of the persons to be protected,” Amnesty International said. Article 1 of the Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials sets the duty for all security forces to “protect all persons against illegal acts.” Amnesty International is concerned at reports suggesting inaction by the police force and senior officials in responding to the violence.

Amnesty International reminds the Government of India of Principle 9 of the Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials, which says that “law enforcement officials shall not use firearms against persons except in self-defence or defence of others against the imminent threat of death or serious injury, to prevent

the perpetration of a particular serious crime involving great threat to life, to arrest a person presenting such a danger and resisting their authority or to prevent his or her escape, and only when less extreme means are insufficient to achieve these objectives.”

The organization welcomes the step taken on 1 March by the National Human Rights Commission, which issued a notice to the Government of Gujarat and to the Director General of Police asking them to submit a report within three days on the incidents and the measures taken to contain them.

“The killings on all sides presently perpetrated in Gujarat must be investigated promptly, effectively, independently and impartially and those responsible brought to justice, irrespective of their position, religious identity or political beliefs. Only by ensuring that there is no impunity for such acts can the Gujarat State and Union government send a clear signal that communal violence will not be tolerated,” the organization said.

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW web : <http://www.amnesty.org>

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