

EXTERNAL

AI Index: ASA 20/19/96

This is a limited action. Please restrict appeals to 20 per Section.

EXTRA 66/96

Fear of arbitrary killing / Fear for safety 14 May 1996

INDIA Civilian electoral officials in the state of Jammu and Kashmir

On 11 May 1996 a death threat was publicly issued by seven armed opposition groups operating in the state of Jammu and Kashmir -- *Hizb-ul-Mujahideen, Tehreek-ul-Mujahideen, Al-Jihad, Al-Barq, Hizbollah, Al-Umer* and *Hizb-ul-Momineen* -- threatening with death any civilian electoral official who carries out polling duties during the forthcoming elections in the Kashmir valley.

The statement, issued to the media, declared, "No government employee will take part in the election duties. ... Any official found taking part will be responsible for his death." According to a Reuters report, the joint statement by the armed opposition groups called upon all officials to suspend their duties, "All government and semi-government offices, educational institutions will remain closed from May 13 to May 31, so that no government official is forced to take part in poll duties". Exempted from this were banks, shops, businesses, ambulance services, emergency hospital treatment and waterworks.

On 13 May, in response to the death threat, most government offices and schools in Srinagar remained closed. However, some offices were open and some officials continued to function.

Numerous abuses by armed opposition groups have been reported in recent months, including torture, deliberate killings and hostage-taking. These abuses contravene international humanitarian law which states that the life of civilians be protected, and forbids torture and hostage-taking.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Polling in the Indian general elections has concluded in all parts of the country with the exception of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Two polling dates remain, 23 and 30 May, covering the remaining four constituencies in the Kashmir valley.

On 7 May, Amnesty International expressed concern about the escalating levels of human rights abuses in the state, in the context of the election. It called on the government and all armed groups to respect human rights and to stop targeting journalists and human rights defenders monitoring the electoral process. The recent death threat deepens the organization's concern for the safety of civilians in the Kashmir valley, particularly in the period leading up to the dates of polling.

The print media has virtually ceased to operate in the Kashmir valley, in response to censorship that has been imposed by the government and by armed opposition groups, in the run-up to the elections, denying citizens the right to their freedom of expression. On 19 April, the *Hizb-ul-Mujahideen* responded to the government restrictions on the editorial of newspapers, by issuing a warning to editors that they would be "dealt with severely" if they published government statements or advertisements.

In recent weeks all the major newspapers in the Kashmir Valley, including both the major English-language dailies, *Greater Kashmir* and the *Mirror of Kashmir*

and the seven Urdu-language dailies with the largest circulation, have ceased to publish for fear of reprisals.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/airmail letters in English or your own language:

- expressing concern for the safety of civilian electoral officials in the state of Jammu and Kashmir;
- calling on *Hizb-ul-Mujahideen, Tehreek-ul-Mujahideen, Al-Jihad, Al-Barq, Hizbollah, Al-Umer* and *Hizb-ul-Momineen* to withdraw the death threat and ensure that no civilian electoral officials are arbitrarily killed;
- calling on all armed opposition groups in Jammu and Kashmir to abide by the principles of international humanitarian law.

APPEALS TO:

Please organize appeals to Multitude Jihad Council in Pakistan, which AI believes has links with all seven armed opposition groups, urging the Council to use its influence to ensure your appeals are received by the groups' leadership. Then please organize as many appeals as you are able, in equal numbers, to the two subsequent addresses:

(FAXES ONLY)

Mr Salabuddin, Chairman
Multitude Jihad Council / United Jihad Council
Muzaffarabad, Azad Kashmir, Pakistan
Faxes: + 92 58 2178 (telephone - ask for fax tone)
Salutation: Dear Mr Salabuddin

Please request the All Parties Hurriyet Conference, an umbrella organization of over 30 opposition groups in Jammu and Kashmir, to use all available channels to pass on your appeals to the leadership of the seven armed opposition groups:

(FAXES, TELEGRAMS, MAIL)

All Parties Hurriyet Conference
Kashmir Awareness Bureau
1-181, Shivalik, Malviya Nagar
New Delhi, 110017, India
Faxes: + 91 11 6215258 (telephone - ask for fax tone)
Telegrams: 1-181, Shivalik, Malviya Nagar, Delhi, India
Salutation: Dear Sir/Madam

(FAXES AND REGISTERED LETTERS ONLY)

All Parties Hurriyet Conference
Mirwaiz Manzil, Rajouri Kadal
Srinagar, 190002, Jammu & Kashmir, India
Faxes: + 91 194 452006 (telephone - ask for fax tone)
Salutation: Dear Sir/Madam

NO COPIES

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 30 May 1996.