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India: Inquiries into Jammu and Kashmir killings must go ahead

Two months ago, Indian officials announced that inquiries would be set up to investigate a series of recent killings in Anantnag district of Jammu and Kashmir. Amnesty International today wrote to the Government of Jammu and Kashmir urging that these investigations be prompt, thorough, public and impartial.

Amnesty International has welcomed these commitments and has asked the government for details of the composition, frame of reference and progress of the inquiries. Only the last of the following incidents is known to be under investigation by a judicial inquiry.

On 20 March 2000, 35 Sikhs in Chithisinghpura were shot dead by a group of unidentified gunmen wearing army uniforms. To date it is not known who was responsible.

Five days later in Panchalthan, five men were killed in what army sources described as an 'encounter' between 'foreign militants' and a unit of army personnel and police. Government officials claimed that the victims had been involved in the earlier targeted killing of Sikhs.

On 3 April, seven people were shot dead at Brakpora when police apparently used excessive force against demonstrators who were demanding that the bodies of the five men killed on 25 March be exhumed to establish their identities. The demonstrators claimed that these men were ordinary villagers who had no connection with any armed group and had been picked up by security forces, "disappeared" in custody and then been extrajudicially executed.

"All too often, inquiries have not led to perpetrators being brought to justice. Amnesty International is seeking assurances that all reports of inquiry findings will promptly be made public and that all those found responsible for the killings will be criminally prosecuted," the organization said.

The organization also urged that compensation be provided without delay to the families of the victims.

The organization also submitted recommendations on bringing the perpetrators of the killings to justice. It requested the government respond to the recommendations within a month so that their comments can be incorporated into a public report.
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