

177/97

AI INDEX: ASA 20/42/97

17 OCTOBER 1997

## **India: Signing of UN Convention against Torture – an encouraging step towards ending torture**

Amnesty International today welcomed India's signing this week of the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT).

"We are encouraged by this demonstration at an international level that the government is taking its commitment to eradicate torture seriously," Amnesty International said today. "We urge the government to now take urgent steps to bring legislation in line with the Convention."

Torture, including sexual abuse and rape, continues to be endemic in India. Hundreds of people die every year in the custody of police, armed or paramilitary forces. In 1993, the Indian Government established the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), which began to address this issue through investigation of selective cases, the award of compensation and the training of law enforcement officials.

In its latest Annual Report, the NHRC recorded that from April 1995 to March 1996 it had admitted a total of 444 cases of deaths in police and jail custody, many as a result of torture. In recent years the NHRC has repeatedly urged the government to ratify the CAT.

However, there continues to be a high level of acceptance of the practice of torture. In March 1997, a survey conducted among Indian Police Service officers at the National Police Academy, Hyderabad -- published in the magazine *India Today* -- revealed that 17 per cent agreed that detainees should be "*subjected to torture and third-degree methods to get to the truth*".

"By signing the Convention, India has made an undertaking not to act contrary to its provisions," Amnesty International said. "The next step for the government is to ratify the CAT at the earliest, to ensure its protection becomes an enforceable reality for all people in India."

### **Background**

The CAT, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1984, details "legislative, judicial, administrative and other measures" that each country needs to take to eradicate torture. It specifies the need for criminal legislation to ensure that torture is an offence, speedy and impartial investigation of each allegation of torture, prosecution of those found responsible and full redress for the victim.

The 10-member Committee against Torture, established under the Convention, will be able to review periodic reports from the Government of India, inquire into allegations of systematic torture and provide expert advice on implementing the Convention in India.

ENDS.../