

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: ASA 31/046/2002 (Public)
News Service No: 102
19 June 2002

Embargo Date: 19 June 2002 01:00 GMT

Nepal: Human rights should be at the heart of London conference agenda

On the first day of an inter-governmental meeting on the crisis in Nepal in London, Amnesty International appealed to all participating governments to prioritize the human rights of civilians.

The meeting is hosted by the United Kingdom (UK) government and is being attended by India, China, USA, Japan, the European Union, Norway, Russia and international agencies such as the World Bank. It is due to draw up a strategy to address a rapidly deteriorating situation in Nepal in the context of the "people's war", declared by the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN, Maoist) six years ago.

Amnesty International recognizes the grave security threat posed by the "people's war" within Nepal and urges the international community to put together a holistic strategy which aims to ensure the protection of the full range of human rights, including access to education, services and economic development as well as the protection of the right to life, physical integrity and fair legal process.

"While recognizing the need to protect civilians, Amnesty International is opposed to any transfers of military and security equipment and expertise to Nepal which will contribute to human rights violations," the organization said. "We appeal to all governments providing arms to attach the strictest conditions to ensure compliance with human rights and humanitarian law standards."

Nepal has requested military assistance from India, the USA and the UK. To Amnesty International's knowledge, India has so far provided two helicopters, and the US Congress has approved a \$20 million military assistance package. The UK government is reportedly considering a request for military and development assistance.

Amnesty International has documented the mounting human rights violations by the security forces and the Maoists since the beginning of the "people's war". The erosion of the rule of law has resulted in an intolerable situation for civilians and increases the internal volatility of Nepal. International insistence on upholding human rights and humanitarian law standards would assist in moves to de-escalate the violence and protect vulnerable civilians.

Background

Since the start of the "people's war" in 1996, Amnesty International has documented grave human rights abuses by the security forces and the Maoists. There has been increasing concern that the authorities

have failed to impose strict limitations on the use of force and firearms by the security forces or to take appropriate actions against abuses. This concern has heightened after the army was called out and the state of emergency imposed in late November 2001. Since then, the number of alleged unlawful killings has increased dramatically. The reported incidents have included killings of civilians in reprisal for the killing of police and army personnel by the Maoists; killings of Maoists in circumstances where they could have been taken into custody or where they already had been taken prisoner, and the avoidable use of lethal force.

The Maoists, who now control a sizable proportion of the country, have taken around 500 people hostage, tortured scores of people, sentenced people to death in "people's courts", and recruited child soldiers. They have targetted not only the security forces but also socio-economic targets such as factories and telecommunications towers.

For a copy of Amnesty International's report on the spiralling human rights crisis, visit:
<http://web.amnesty.org/ai.nsf/recent/asa310162002>

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