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Nepal: human rights abuses have reached unprecedented levels

More than 4,366 people have been killed in the conflict in Nepal since the breakdown of talks between the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN-Maoist) and the government in November 2001. A new report published today by Amnesty International "*Nepal: a deepening human rights crisis*" (ASA31/072/2002) reveals that nearly half of the victims of the 'people's war' were civilians targeted for their real or perceived support to the CPN-Maoist; others were Maoists deliberately killed after they were taken prisoner or killed instead of being arrested.

The report also highlights that at least 66 people are reported to have 'disappeared' in the last year, after being taken into custody by the security forces. The total number of 'disappearances' reported to the organization in the context of the 'people's war' is over 200. This makes Nepal the country with the third highest number of 'disappearances' reported worldwide in the last four years.

"Human rights abuses have reached unprecedented levels since the army was called out and the security forces given new powers," Amnesty International said today.

"It is clear that the authorities in Nepal lack the willingness to remedy the situation and tackle the endemic impunity in the country. There is an urgent need for international assistance to provide increased human rights protection and create a law enforcement system capable of addressing reports of human rights violations with greater transparency and accountability," Amnesty International continued.

In the report -- which will be submitted to members of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in Geneva in 2003 -- Amnesty International calls for the establishment in Nepal of an office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, to include international human rights monitors and to assist the Nepalese government in strengthening systems for the investigation and indictment of perpetrators of human rights violations.

Maoist forces have also been responsible for a number of human rights violations including the killing of an estimated 800 civilians considered 'enemies of the revolution', hostage taking for ransom, torturing of people taken captive and the deliberate killing of members of the security forces after they were taken captive. The Maoists have also been responsible for recruiting children into their army.

In one incident around 300 Maoists dragged all male villagers above age 15 from their homes at Sumshergunj, Banke district on 9 July 2002. Around 25 people were beaten with clubs, rifle butts and spears and accused of handing over two Maoists to the police who earlier that day had attacked one of

the villagers. Two men, Moti Lal Tamauli and Sohan Yadav Ahil died on the spot. Several others were severely wounded.

Recruitment of children by the Maoists has been reported on a regular basis. Amnesty International has evidence of how children were trained in the use of arms. One 14 year old girl explained how arms training took place during the night by torch light and how during the day, she and other children attended classes.

The Commander of the Armed Services told Amnesty International in September 2002 that it is the army's mission to 'disarm and defeat the Maoists'. Army commanders said that civilians who give shelter, food or money to the armed Maoists are also Maoists themselves. The fact that much of this 'assistance' is given under threat from the Maoists was not fully recognised. Many of the victims of killings by the security forces are such civilians.

Torture by the army, Armed Police Force (APF) and police is reported almost daily. The APF which was established in 2001, has been increasingly cited in allegations of torture. The army systematically held people blindfolded and handcuffed for days, weeks or even months. Torture methods included rape, *falanga* (beatings on the soles of the feet), electric shocks, *belana* (rolling a weighted stick along the prisoner's thighs causing muscle damage), and beating with iron rods covered in plastic and mock executions.

According to official figures released in August 2002, 9,900 'Maoists' had been arrested of whom 1,722 remained in custody. Most arrests and initial period of detentions take place outside any legal framework, especially when suspects are held in army custody. The army denies holding detainees beyond the legally permitted period of 24 hours specified in the Army Act. However, there is overwhelming evidence of people being held for long periods incommunicado in army barracks.

"Impunity is the single most destructive factor affecting the human rights situation. Members of the security forces feel entirely shielded from outside scrutiny for their actions. The heaviest sanction they face is an internal inquiry," Amnesty International said.

"It is time everyone is held to account for their actions, in Nepal."

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