

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

AI Index: ASA 20/018/2006 (Public)
News Service No: 186
17 July 2006

India: Continuing concern over the safety of civilians, including adivasis, caught in escalating conflict in Chattisgarh

Amnesty International expresses grave concern about continuing violence in a remote forest region of Chattisgarh state in central India. On the night of 17 July, suspected Maoists belonging to the People's War Group (PWG) attacked a camp run by the state government for the supporters of an anti-Maoist campaign in Dantewada region of the state, killing 17 civilians and injuring 70 others.

According to reports obtained by Amnesty International, the Maoists also attacked an outpost of the paramilitary Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) at the camp, located at Errabore, before abducting at least 20 persons including a woman police officer.

AI has continuing concern over the safety of ordinary people including *adivasis* (tribal communities) in the wake of the ongoing violent conflict between the PWG and members of the "anti-Maoist" campaign known as *Salwa Judum*. This campaign, whose purpose is to eradicate the PWG, is widely regarded by local human rights organisations as being sponsored by the state.

Human rights organisations in India report that the *adivasis* in this region remain trapped in the violent conflict between the security forces and the Maoists. They also allege that the *Salwa Judum* campaign is used by the state government to intimidate Maoist sympathizers and supporters. The reports indicate that more than 40,000 people, including *adivasis*, remain confined to temporary camps where they cannot adequately support themselves and their families.

Indian human rights activists allege that the *Salwa Judum* has compelled the *adivasis* to participate in its activities, with those unwilling to do so risking attack by the state police and the CRPF.

Sources also state that the government of Chattisgarh, while acknowledging the killings by the Maoists, has yet to investigate the deaths of those believed to have been killed by the *Salwa Judum*.

In December 2005, the state government of Chattisgarh enacted new security legislation which could potentially grant it sweeping powers to restrict the rights to freedom of expression and assembly in the state.

Amnesty International urges the Chattisgarh government to investigate all killings of civilians in the region and amend the security legislation to ensure that the rights to freedom of expression and assembly are respected.