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Nepal: State of emergency deepens human rights crisis

Royal takeover prompts fears for safety of critics

King Gyanendra of Nepal today dismissed the Government, assumed direct power, and declared a nation-wide state of emergency. This action plunges the country deeper into crisis and puts the Nepalese people at even greater risk of gross human rights abuses, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and the International Commission of Jurists said today. Widespread human rights abuses have taken place during the nine-year conflict in Nepal between government forces and the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) (Maoist) rebels.

Political leaders have been placed under arrest and communications links within Nepal and with the outside world have been severed. All independent Nepali media have been closed down and state owned radio announced that a number of rights -- including freedom of movement and freedom of assembly -- have been suspended.

"The international community must make it immediately clear to the King that by assuming power he is directly responsible for protecting the people of Nepal and safeguarding their fundamental human rights," the organizations said. A number of countries, including India, have already expressed concern at the situation.

The organizations fear for the immediate safety of human rights campaigners, political activists and members of the National Human Rights Commission, who have recently faced increasing harassment from both security forces and the CPN (Maoist).

The organizations are urging the UN Commission on Human Rights to appoint a Special Rapporteur to monitor the human rights situation in Nepal when it meets in Geneva next month.

Basic human rights must be fully protected even in times of emergency. These include the right to life and the prohibition of torture and ill-treatment, as well as fundamental principles of fair trial and freedom from arbitrary detention. The organizations are concerned that the steps being taken by the King and the army, as described above, have been sweeping, arbitrary, and excessive.

Nepal's last state of emergency in 2001-2002 led to an explosion of serious human rights violations, including increased extra-judicial killings, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detention, and a breakdown in the rule of law.

Today's move comes just one week after the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Louise Arbour, met King Gyanendra in Nepal and strongly voiced her concerns over the unfolding human rights crisis in Nepal. She noted a prevailing climate of impunity for serious human rights abuses committed by both the government and the CPN (Maoist)

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