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Nepal: Heads of three human rights organizations call for targeted sanctions

(Geneva) Nepal's King Gyanendra and his senior officials and top military officers should be refused entry to other countries and have any personal assets outside the country frozen, urged Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the International Commission of Jurists. The organizations issued their call during an international meeting in Geneva convened by the Government of Switzerland to review Nepal's human rights record.

King Gyanendra assumed total and direct executive authority on 1 February 2005. Since then, he and his officials have been responsible for serious human rights violations, including the arbitrary arrest and detention of thousands of critics, torture and ill-treatment of detainees, and severe restrictions on freedom of speech and assembly. The army continues to violate international human rights and humanitarian law in its war against Maoist insurgents.

The organizations said the sanctions should target those directly responsible for setting or implementing abusive policies, including King Gyanendra, his deputy the Vice Chairman of the Council of Ministers Tulsi Giri, his Home Minister Kamal Thapa, his Justice Minister Niranjana Thapa, and his Information Minister Suresh Shamsheer Rana. The sanctions should also cover top security officers such as Chief of Army Staff General Pyar Jung Thapa, Inspector General of Police Shyam Bhakta Thapa, and the Inspector General of the Armed Police Force Shahabir Thapa.

"The human cost of the conflict in Nepal has been catastrophic: people have been killed or 'disappeared', women attacked and raped, children abducted to fight as soldiers and critics of the regime have been locked up," said Amnesty International's Secretary General, Irene Khan. "King Gyanendra's government seems impervious to the suffering of the people. The international community must now apply pressure through targeted sanctions that will have a direct impact on the King and his cohorts."

The three human rights organizations said these targeted sanctions should be lifted only when there is clear evidence that the Government of Nepal is complying with the demands of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights as set out in the 2005 resolution on Nepal.

Nepal's biggest suppliers of military assistance -- India, the United States and the United Kingdom -- have already suspended the transfer of lethal military assistance to the Government of Nepal. Foreign militaries, particularly in India, the United States and United Kingdom, should make it clear that they will not have normal dealings with the Royal Nepalese Army until there is a dramatic improvement in its human rights record.

"Sanctions targeting the King and top officials responsible for such serious human rights violations are necessary to get them to change their abusive behaviour," said Kenneth Roth, Executive Director of Human

Rights Watch. "King Gyanendra's government has shown that it will only respond to international pressure when its interests are at stake."

The government's abuses over the last year took place amidst the efforts of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Nepal and in defiance of the strong resolution adopted by the UN Commission on Human Rights on 20 April 2005, urging the Government of Nepal to cease arbitrary arrests and extrajudicial killings, stop the use of torture and ill-treatment, and end impunity for human rights violations committed by members of the security forces.

The Nepali government's abusive behaviour took a turn for the worse on the eve of pro-democracy protests called for 6 - 9 April. Members of the police and military, under the King's direct command, have used excessive force to respond to country-wide demonstrations, killing at least six people and injuring hundreds of others. The authorities have detained thousands of protesters. More than 800 continue to be detained under the Public Security Act, many without access to lawyers or their families.

"Nepal is in a double crisis – the armed conflict and the conflict over democracy," said Nicholas Howen, Secretary-General of the International Commission of Jurists. "By sweeping away democracy and stifling legitimate protest and dissent, the King is denying his people the democratic space they need to decide their future and to resolve the conflict peacefully. It is time for the international community to step up its response."

The latest political repression has compounded an already grave human rights crisis. Nepal's decade-long civil war has claimed the lives of thousands of civilians, forced hundreds of thousands of people to flee from their homes, and limited access to food, health care, and education. Both parties to the conflict have carried out gross violations of international humanitarian and human rights law. The organizations reiterated their repeated calls on the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) to end the practices condemned by the UN Commission on Human Rights in 2005. The organizations warned that a combined human rights and humanitarian crisis in Nepal would have implications for regional security.

The human rights groups called on the United Nations Security Council to put the human rights crisis in Nepal on its agenda, and impose a global regime of targeted sanctions on the senior Nepali officials. They invited Nepal's neighbours and major donors, such as India, China, Japan, the European Union, and the United States, to work together to implement the sanctions immediately.

The organizations recalled that those responsible for violations of international human rights and humanitarian law must be held personally and criminally accountable.

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