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BANGLADESH

Steps to end impunity

(Seminar on human rights and impunity, Dhaka, 10 December 1996)

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Amnesty International's Bangladesh section is holding a seminar on impunity and human rights on 10 December 1996 in Dhaka. The section seeks to raise awareness about the issue of impunity in Bangladesh and the need to bring to justice perpetrators of human rights violations at all times and without exception.

Amnesty International believes that the phenomenon of impunity is one of the main contributing factors to the continuing pattern of human rights violations the world over. Impunity, literally the exemption from punishment, has serious implication for the state of human rights protection in a country. By bringing criminal charges against perpetrators of human rights violations, the government sends a clear message that such violation will not be tolerated and that those found responsible will be held fully accountable. When investigations are not pursued and the perpetrators are not held to account, a self-perpetuating cycle of violence is set in motion resulting in continuing violations of human rights.

If extrajudicial executions, torture and other grave human rights violations are to be brought to an end, Amnesty International believes that all governments must fulfil certain fundamental responsibilities. First, there should be prompt, thorough, impartial and independent investigations conducted according to international standards into all allegations of human rights violations in order to determine responsibility. The results of such inquiries should be made public. Secondly, those found responsible for human rights violation should be brought to justice without delay. Thirdly, their trials should follow internationally established fair trial standards, and they should not be sentenced to death or other cruel, inhuman or degrading punishments. Fourthly, amnesty laws or indemnifying provisions which prevent the emergence of truth and accountability before the law should not be passed so that respect for human rights is secured through a fair judicial process.

Amnesty International further recommends the setting up of an easily accessible complaints procedure and an independent and impartial mechanism to enable prompt and impartial investigation of human rights violations. Criteria for the composition, terms of reference and procedures of such commissions of enquiry

should be based on international human rights standards including the provisions of the UN Principles on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-Legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions. Governments must ensure that witnesses do not themselves become victims of human rights violations. It goes without saying that only when complainants are assured of protection will they provide the evidence that will enable a tribunal to ascertain whether human rights violations have been committed.

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