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26 MARCH 1997 -- FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

INDIA: KILLING OF HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST SHOULD NOT BE FORGOTTEN

One year after prominent lawyer and human rights activist Jalil Andrabi was killed in Jammu and Kashmir, Amnesty International today condemned the Indian government's failure to cooperate with the enquiry into his death.

Jalil Andrabi's body was discovered on 27 March 1996 in the Jhelum river in Jammu and Kashmir. He had been arrested two weeks earlier by Indian paramilitary forces as he was driving home with his wife. Mr Andrabi had fought for many years to improve prison conditions and documented cases of arbitrary arrests, custodial killings and "disappearances".

"Despite a special investigation under the direction of the Jammu and Kashmir High Court, the truth has still not been revealed," Amnesty International said. "The Indian government seems content to consign his fate, like hundreds of other human rights victims, to oblivion."

In a report released today, Amnesty International noted with concern the reported failure of the state to cooperate with the inquiry, and the fact that no member of the security forces has been suspended or criminally charged with causing his death. Despite repeated orders of the Jammu and Kashmir High Court, the post-mortem report has not been submitted to the investigation team. Orders issued in August 1996 to arrest suspects for interrogation have also been ignored.

According to the report, a prompt conclusion to the investigation of Jalil Andrabi's killing and the criminal prosecution of those responsible would be an important signal that the government of Jammu and Kashmir, elected in October 1996 after seven years of central rule, is ending impunity in the state.

"Without justice being done, and being seen to be done, the people of Jammu and Kashmir will have little confidence in the state government's commitment to protect human rights."

Hundreds of "disappeared" young men are unaccounted for and hundreds of others have died in custody or been extrajudicially executed by police or security forces over the past few years. Amnesty International is calling on the authorities to instigate prompt and impartial inquiries into all of these grave human rights violations.

The organization also urged the authorities to ensure the Jammu and Kashmir Human Rights Commission which is to be set up soon, is empowered to investigate allegations of human rights violations committed by security forces.

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