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Nepal: Amnesty International condemns horrific killings of teachers by Maoists

In a public appeal addressed to the leadership of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) today, Amnesty International condemned in the strongest terms recent execution-style killings and maiming of scores of teachers, including a member of Amnesty International.

Muktinath Adhikari was reportedly abducted by Maoists on 16 January while teaching at the Pandini Sanskrit Secondary school at Duradanda, Lamjung district. A group of four Maoists tied his hands behind his back, and took him about 200m from the school. There he was tied to a tree and shot in the stomach. He died on the spot. Muktinath Adhikari is convenor of Amnesty International local group in Lamjung district; he was acting headmaster of the school. It is suspected that the reason for the killing of Muktinath Adhikari is his membership of the Nepal Teachers' Association affiliated to the ruling Nepali Congress Party (NC). Apparently he had earlier refused to give "donations" demanded by the Maoists and had received threats.

Harka Raj Rai, headmaster of Sisapani High School at Kaule village, Khotang district was abducted on 16 January by members of the Khumbuvan Liberation Front, affiliated to the CPN (Maoist). He was shot dead later that day.

Twenty eight teachers have been deliberately killed by the Maoists, nine of whom since a state of emergency was declared in late November 2001; dozens of others have been maimed. On 12 January, Maoists killed three people, including Top Bahadur Subba, a teacher at a village in Terhathum district. In the evening of 11 January, Tak Bahadur

Patangwa, a teacher at Janta Secondary School, Taplejung district was among four people killed, reportedly by a group of around 35 Maoists who had entered the house where they were sleeping. On 6 January, a group of Maoists entered the home of Rameshwor Pokharel, the headmaster of Sharada High School in Khoplang, Gorkha district and attacked him. The victim's relatives said the rebels broke his leg with a hammer. Shiva Prasad Adhikari, 28, a teacher at Mancha Kanya High School, Hansapur village, Gorkha district was brutally attacked in his school. He died while undergoing treatment at the Bhacchek Health Centre on 17 December. On 23 December, Maoists hacked off the hand of Khem Bahadur Rana, the Headmaster of Bahakot High School, Syangja district.

Background information

Since the breakdown of a ceasefire and talks between the government and the Maoists and the subsequent declaration of the state of emergency on 26 November 2001, Amnesty International has been increasingly concerned about the deterioration of the human rights situation in Nepal, which has been accompanied by an increase in reports of human rights abuses by the army, police and Maoists.

Amnesty International has repeatedly appealed to the Maoist leadership to uphold minimum humanitarian standards such as those contained in Article 3, common to the four Geneva Conventions of 1949, which prohibits governments and armed opposition groups alike to torture anyone, to kill people taking no active part in hostilities, to harm those who are wounded, captured or seeking to surrender, or to take hostages.

More than six years into the "people's war", the insurgency has affected lives in almost all of the 75 districts of the country. In more than 60 districts, people have died in the context of the "people's war". In addition to conducting armed operations against the army, police and

socio-economic targets, the CPN (Maoist) has been responsible for the deliberate killings of an estimated 400 civilians considered to be "enemies of the revolution", including alleged informants. Many of the victims were supporters or members of the NC, although members of other political parties were among those killed. The Maoists have also been responsible for execution-style killings of police officers who were wounded or taken prisoner or who had surrendered. In addition, in the period between February 1996 and late July 2001 they have taken approximately 500 hostages, tortured scores of people taken captive and imposed cruel, inhuman or degrading punishments, including an estimated 25 "death sentences". They have also recruited children as combatants. These abuses continued throughout the cease-fire period and after the resumption of the conflict, albeit initially on a reduced scale.

In December 2000 the Maoists' students wing called a week-long closure of all schools to protest against the singing of the national anthem (on the grounds that it glorifies the King) and the teaching of Sanskrit (on the grounds that it disadvantages children from ethnic minorities). They have also campaigned for the closure of all private schools and have instructed children to attend government-run schools. According to unconfirmed reports, Harka Raj Rai (see above) was killed because he had continued to teach Sanskrit despite warnings from the Khumbuvan Liberation Front to stop doing so.

According to official sources, since the declaration of the state of emergency, more than 350 Maoists have been killed by the army and police. Amnesty International has appealed to the Prime Minister to ensure the right to life is upheld. It fears that among those killed are scores of civilians and Maoists who were deliberately killed as an alternative to being taken prisoner. The official version of such killings is that people were "killed in crossfire", "shot when trying to escape" or "shot when running away".