

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

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Nepal: Amnesty International calls for end to attacks on civilians

Amnesty International today condemned the mounting attacks on civilians by Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) (Maoist) members and called on the CPN (Maoist) to respect human rights and abide by international humanitarian standards.

Amnesty International has received reports of at least 14 civilians killed by the CPN (Maoist) since the beginning of May. This figure includes seven civilian passengers who were indiscriminately killed on 9 May - together with seven Royal Nepal Army (RNA) soldiers and one Armed Police Force official - when CPN (Maoist) members fired at a public bus in Dholaka, central Nepal.

There has also been an increase in the bombing and ambushing of civilian targets by the CPN (Maoist). This includes the bombing of Sinkitar Land Integration Project in Bhaktapur on 3 May, the Agriculture Development Bank office and main market in Dhulabari on 8 and 9 May, and the Bhaktapur Survey Office and the Moondrops Overseas Services in Kathmandu on 10 May. In addition, on 11 May CPN (Maoist) members reportedly ambushed a civilian ambulance in Charaudi, Dhading district. At least eight civilians were injured in these attacks.

Amnesty International is also seriously concerned at recent alleged abductions by CPN (Maoist) members, including the taking of hostages and mass abductions of villagers, teachers and students for forced "education" sessions. Since 1 May, it has been reported that more than 350 students have been abducted from villages in far western Nepal, 36 teachers have been abducted from schools in Sindhuli, and 221 teachers and students have been abducted in East Lamjung. There have also been unconfirmed reports that up to 1,500 teachers and students were abducted from Rukum district.

"These grave abuses violate fundamental human rights to life, liberty and security", said Amnesty International. "We call on the leadership of the CPN (Maoist) to order an immediate halt to all attacks on civilians and uphold minimum humanitarian standards as contained in Article 3 common to the four Geneva Conventions of 1949, which prohibits violence to life and person, the taking of hostages and summary executions of those not actively engaged in the conflict."

Amnesty International also expressed concern at reports of threats by the CPN (Maoist) towards aid organisations. Referring to the 10 May announcement that ten international donors are suspending work in six districts of mid-western Nepal because of "serious demands and threats" by local CPN (Maoist) members, Amnesty International commented that "by obstructing the delivery of aid and services to some of Nepal's poorest communities, the CPN (Maoist) are endangering the basic economic and social rights of the estimated 55,000 recipients of that aid".

Background

Since the breakdown of the ceasefire between the government and CPN (Maoist) on 27 August 2003,

fighting between the RNA and CPN (Maoist) members has resumed throughout the country, and Amnesty International is receiving increased reports of human rights abuses.

Amnesty International has consistently condemned the deliberate and indiscriminate attacks on civilians by both sides of the conflict. It has appealed to the CPN (Maoist) to abide by its stated commitments to fundamental human rights standards and the Geneva Conventions, as made by CPN (Maoist) leaders Babu Ram Bhattarai and Prachanda, in April 2003 and March 2004 respectively. On 20 April 2004 the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, in its Chairperson's Statement on "Human Rights Assistance to Nepal" called on the CPN (Maoist) to "respect the rights of all people".

Moves initiated in 2004 by the National Human Rights Commission of Nepal to develop a Human Rights Accord that would commit both the Nepal government and the CPN (Maoist) to uphold human rights have stalled, in part because of government reluctance to formally recognise the CPN (Maoist). Instead, on 26 March 2004, the Nepal government independently issued a formal "Commitment on the implementation of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law". However, Amnesty International believes that a common human rights agreement, to which the CPN (Maoist) can commit and be held accountable, is necessary for the protection of human rights in Nepal.