

## **AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL INDIA**

### **PRESS RELEASE**

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#### **India: Authorities must impartially investigate gang-rape and murder of Dalit girls, end impunity for violence against Dalits**

The gang-rape and murder of two teenage Dalit girls in Badaun, Uttar Pradesh is a gruesome reminder of the violence that Dalit women and girls face in India, Amnesty International India said today.

The girls - aged 14 and 16 – went missing on the night of 27 May. They had gone to a field to relieve themselves because they did not have access to a toilet at home. The father of one of the girls says he sought the help of the local police to find them, but the policemen on duty refused to register or investigate the complaint and slapped him instead. The next morning, the bodies of the girls were found hanging from a tree near their houses. Autopsies indicate that both girls had been gang-raped and strangled.

The police have arrested two men from a dominant caste on suspicion of being involved in the gang-rape and murder, and are searching for more suspects. A police constable has been suspended for dereliction of duty, and another arrested.

“Despite the existence of constitutional safeguards and special laws, Dalits across India – and Dalit women in particular - face multiple levels of discrimination and violence,” said Divya Iyer, Senior Researcher, Amnesty International India

“Members of dominant castes are known to use sexual violence against Dalit women and girls as a political tool for punishment, humiliation and assertion of power.”

Crimes against Dalits are often not properly registered or investigated, conviction rates are low, and there is a large backlog of cases. Police are also known to collude with perpetrators from dominant castes in covering up crimes by not registering or investigating offences against Dalits.

The lack of adequate sanitation facilities across India also poses a serious threat to the safety of women and girls forced to practice open defecation, making them more vulnerable to violence. More than 600 million people – over half of India’s population – defecate in the open.

India is obligated under international law to take appropriate and effective measures to prevent and punish all forms of sexual and gender-based violence. Authorities in Uttar Pradesh must ensure that the gang-rape and murder are impartially investigated, and those responsible swiftly brought to justice. They must also hold accountable any police personnel found to have refused to register or investigate complaints.

“India’s new government must take immediate and far-reaching measures to protect Dalit women’s rights to safety and dignity, and end impunity for crimes against them,” Divya Iyer said.

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For media queries:

Durga Nandini, Senior Media Officer, [durga.nandini@amnesty.org.in](mailto:durga.nandini@amnesty.org.in), +91 9711994035,

Himanshi Matta, Media Officer, [himanshi.matta@amnesty.org.in](mailto:himanshi.matta@amnesty.org.in), +91 88601 82310