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## **India: Armed groups target civilians in Assam**

*Following the killing of over 100 civilians in Assam in November and December 2000, Amnesty International today called on all parties involved in the conflicts in the state to publicly commit to international humanitarian law which prohibits the killing of civilians.*

*"In light of the escalating violence and conflicting claims about who has carried out the killings, the government must exercise some control over this dire situation and initiate impartial and independent investigations to reveal the perpetrators and bring them to justice," the organization said.*

*The majority of those killed were settlers, from the states of Bihar and Rajasthan, and Nepalese and Bhutanese citizens -- including several women and children.*

*The United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) has been accused of carrying out many of the attacks on civilians -- mainly Bihari and Nepali labourers who have settled in Assam. These occurred in Bongaingaon district on 30 November when 19 civilians were killed and 12 wounded; Nalbari district on 3 December and Tinsukia district on 7 December when 29 civilians were killed and 16 wounded near Sadiya.*

*In October the ULFA denied the killing of 16 traders in Tinsukia district and stated that they did not endorse indiscriminate violence against civilians. Those responsible reportedly left behind propaganda leaflets of the Assam Tiger Force, a previously unknown group.*

Attacks have also been carried out in the context of the conflict between tribal Bodo groups seeking a separate state of Bodoland in western Assam. On 24 November, eight woodcutters were killed by suspected members of the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) in Kokrajhar district -- an area where numerous similar attacks against non-Bodo settlers have taken place in recent years.

Bodo armed groups were blamed for the killing of 13 Bhutanese nationals on 20 and 21 December. The Government of India have claimed that the killings were perpetrated by the NDFB while the Government of Bhutan claims to have evidence that the attacks were carried out by members of the Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT). In May 2000, the BLT -- a group allegedly supported by Indian security forces -- began tripartite talks with the Government of India and the Government of Assam. At the same time a ceasefire was initiated.

On 1 December three Muslim labourers were killed in Karbi Anglong district of Eastern Assam. The killings were attributed to the United People's Democratic Solidarity (UPDS), a secessionist armed group which emerged in 1998 and which has targetted non-tribal civilians in a number of attacks. On 28 December eight Hindi-speaking villagers, including women and children, were allegedly killed by UPDS in the same district.

### **Background**

ULFA and the NDFB are fighting for separate status for Assam and Bodoland respectively. They accuse the Government of India of exploiting Assam's resources, neglecting the local economy and flooding the area with settlers from outside the state. In the course of the conflict, the security forces in Assam have been accused of widespread human rights violations against civilians and suspected members of armed groups. In addition, there have been widespread allegations that surrendered members of ULFA have been used by the security forces to target

*members of ULFA and their relatives -- around 20 in the past three years.*

*In recent years, talks have been ongoing between the governments of Bhutan and India to stop ULFA and NDFB from using bases inside Bhutan to launch attacks against security forces and economic targets in Assam.*

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