

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

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India: AI membership expresses solidarity to the families of the disappeared in Punjab

Amnesty International is concerned that thousands of families are still waiting to know the fate of their relatives who were "disappeared" in police custody in the period of militancy in Punjab and may have been extrajudicially executed and illegally cremated by the Punjab police.

The culture of impunity which developed within the criminal justice system in the state during the militancy period continues. Amnesty International believes that until it is reversed and the procedures and attitudes which facilitated abuses during that period are changed, human rights abuses will continue in the state.

An essential part of this process of change would be to bring to justice those responsible for these past abuses. It is with this in mind that Amnesty International members during February and March 2003 will be sending cards to the families of people who were illegally cremated, to show international solidarity for their pursuit of justice.

Background:

Despite a Supreme Court judgement in December 1996 which ordered the National Human Rights Commission to examine the findings of the Central Bureau of Investigations (CBI) that there had been 2,097 illegal cremations by police officials in Amritsar district, there have been severe delays in the process and procedural limitations imposed on investigations. The State of Punjab has only just begun to file its *affidavits* on those cases under examination by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC). Furthermore, the recommendations, that the NHRC may make, including for prosecution of police officers, are not binding on the criminal justice system and there is no guarantee that the CBI will follow up on the NHRC's investigation with regard to prosecutions.

For more information please see our latest report on Punjab: *"India: Break the cycle of impunity and torture in Punjab"*.

Public Document

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