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Nepal: A spiralling human rights crisis

Nepal's six-year-old "people's war" has generated a human rights crisis that is putting the country's future at risk, Amnesty International said today in a new report.

The report provides a comprehensive background to the conflict, describing abuses by both sides, and makes several recommendations.

Human rights protection has been swept aside as both the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN, Maoist) and government security forces have engaged in "disappearances", abductions, torture and unlawful killings.

"The conflict has had a grave impact on civilians. Scores of civilians are likely to be among the 1,300 suspected Maoists killed by the security forces and the Maoists have killed more than 440 civilians believed to be 'enemies of the revolution'," Amnesty International said.

Ignoring the rules of war, the police have killed several hundred Maoists who should have been taken into custody and the Maoists have executed scores of police officers who were wounded, taken prisoner or who had surrendered.

The situation has deteriorated since peace talks broke down and a state of emergency was declared in November last year. Police have arrested more than 5000 people, and special counter-terrorism measures have undermined basic human rights.

"Where is the accountability when the head of police has said that police officers have killed innocent people and maltreated locals during patrols? This cycle of violence will not be broken until the government takes serious action to investigate human rights violations and punish those responsible," Amnesty International said.

"At least 29 teachers have been deliberately killed by the Maoists, including two members of Amnesty International. The dead body of Lekhnath Gautam, a 34-year-old teacher and father of three, was found on 23 March 2002 in Panchthar district. Maoists abducted him from his home in the middle of the night two days earlier. Like many teachers before him, he was probably killed because of his membership of the Nepal Teachers' Association which is considered close to the ruling Nepali Congress Party (NC). Scores of teachers have also been maimed. Amnesty International has appealed directly to the Maoist leadership to respect the rules of war."

The Maoists, who now control a sizable proportion of the country, have taken around 500 people hostage, tortured scores of people, sentenced people to death in "people's courts", and recruited child soldiers. They have targetted not only the security forces but also socio-economic targets such as factories and telecommunications towers.

While recognising the grave security threat posed by the "people's war" Amnesty International is urging the government to adopt a broad-based strategy to ensure protection of the full range of human rights including access to education, services and economic development.

Amnesty International's report also said that the international community has been slow to wake up to the human rights crisis in Nepal and should offer sustained assistance to bring about a resolution. The turmoil in Nepal could exacerbate already high regional tensions.

"Nepal is facing a downward spiral of violence and instability -- respect for human rights must be at the heart of urgent efforts to stop and reverse this decline," Amnesty International said.

Background -- The People's War

February 1996 -- The Maoists declare the "people's war"

May 1998 -- Human rights violations increase dramatically after police launch a "security mobilisation operation"

February 2000 -- UN expert on unlawful killing visits Nepal and urges the international community to support the government with resources, including funding and expertise.

Mid 2001 -- Maoists set up "people's government" in 22 districts

23 November 2001 -- Peace talks break down, Maoists attack police and army posts in 42 districts

26 November 2001-- State of emergency declared. New anti-terrorism measures give wide powers to the security forces.

For a copy of the report visit

<http://www.web.amnesty.org/ai.nsf/index/asa310162002>

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