

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## **Nepal: Civilians sucked into ongoing conflict**

Plans to set up 'Rural Volunteer Security Groups and Peace Committees' can place the civilian population in grave danger by seriously compromising their neutrality, said Amnesty International in a letter written to prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa.

"Without appropriate supervision, training and clearly defined mechanisms for accountability, there is a clear risk that the creation of these groups could lead to an increase in human rights violations carried out with impunity. Those refusing to join are likely to be seen as tacitly supporting the armed opposition," the organization continued.

Plans to introduce "Rural Volunteer Security Groups and Peace Committees" were made public on 4 November. The Committees are being set up as a way "to promote the role of the general citizens in maintaining peace and security" in the context of the ongoing conflict between the security forces and the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) (Maoist).

"The introduction of such groups affects the sense or interpretation of the Geneva Conventions of 1949, in relation to the state's responsibility at all times to clearly separate civilians from combatants," Amnesty International said today.

"We have already seen the effects of civil defence groups in countries like Guatemala, where in the 1980s, the Patrullas de Autodefensa Civil (Civil Defence Patrols) were responsible for atrocious human rights abuses."

"The creation of such groups could also have a negative effect on reconciliation efforts when the two sides lay down their arms and peace negotiations resume, since they have the effect of setting neighbours and communities against each other", Amnesty International added.

The organization also asked for clarification of the government's plans to institute a Human Rights Promotion Centre and how this would relate to the mandate and work of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC).

Amnesty International is concerned that human rights violations are being carried out with impunity and that the incidence of such violations appears to be increasing as the country slides towards militarization.

### **Background**

On 29 January 2003, the government and CPN (Maoist) declared a cease-fire. Three rounds of peace talks were held - in April, May and August - between the government and representatives of the CPN (Maoist). The CPN (Maoist) had listed among their central demands a round table conference, the formation of an interim government and elections to a constituent assembly to draft a new Constitution.

The CPN (Maoist) announced they were withdrawing from the cease-fire agreement on 27 August. Since then, fighting between the two sides has resumed throughout the country, and Amnesty International has received reports of human rights abuses committed by both sides to the conflict

Amnesty International has publicly condemned the deliberate and indiscriminate attacks on civilians by members of the CPN (Maoist) which occurred during the cease-fire period. Some of these attacks were investigated by the NHRC and included the killing of a civilian truck driver who had given a lift to five army personnel in a landmine explosion in Nagi village, Panchthar district, on 5 August.

The organization has repeatedly appealed to the CPN (CPN) (Maoist) to abide by the principles of international humanitarian law as reflected in Article 3, common to the four Geneva Conventions of 1949.

Amnesty International continues to call upon the government and the leadership of the CPN (Maoist) to sign a Human Rights Accord which would give the NHRC a mandate to set up five regional offices to monitor human rights with technical assistance provided by the UN.

#### Public Document

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