

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## PUBLIC STATEMENT

AI Index: ASA 20/005/2011  
22 February 2011

### **India: Maoist kidnappings come against backdrop of rising violence**

The Communist Party of India (Maoist), an armed opposition group, must immediately release two officials, including a head of the local administration in Orissa, whom they have been holding as hostages since 16 February and must ensure their safety and well-being as long as they detain them, Amnesty International said.

The kidnappings occur against the backdrop of increasing violence in Orissa state, with a rise in the number of Maoist suspects shot dead by the police and attacks on civilians by Maoists claiming four lives.

The two officials – Vineel Krishna, the collector of Malkangiri district in south-western Orissa and Pabitra Majhi, a junior engineer – were abducted after they had launched development programmes in the relatively underdeveloped Chitrakonda area of Orissa, which is largely inhabited by *adivasi* (indigenous) communities.

Accompanying the two was another official who arrived at Malkangiri carrying the news of their abduction. The Maoists later issued a four-page communiqué to the media demanding that the state's police force stop ongoing operations against them throughout Orissa and release seven Maoist leaders (including Padma, a female leader) in jail in the states of Orissa and Andhra Pradesh.

Amnesty International points out that the taking of hostages is prohibited by international law. It is contrary to fundamental principles of humanity, as reflected in international humanitarian law, to seize or detain anyone and threaten to kill or harm them if the authorities do not comply with the hostage-takers' demands. The organization urges the Maoists to stop threatening to kill or harm these officials and guarantee their lives and safety.

According to the latest reports, Orissa authorities and civil rights activists who arrived from Andhra Pradesh are negotiating with the Maoists to secure the release of the abducted officials. The civil rights activists – Professor G Haragopal and Someswar Rao – have sought more time for negotiations to proceed and the authorities have halted operations against the Maoists in Malkangiri district.

Amnesty International also urges the Orissa authorities to institute impartial investigations into the killings of 25 Maoist suspects, including ten *adivasis*, at the hands of the state police during December-January. While the police claimed that these persons were shot dead during combat operations, human rights activists based in Orissa and Andhra Pradesh conducted fact-finding missions that yielded evidence to suggest that most of the victims were not armed Maoist cadres but sympathisers detained during search operations and extra-judicially executed.

Only two of the 25 killings – Madhav Singh Thakur and Ramesh Sahoo, both activists of the Gandhamardhan Surakhya Yuva Parishad campaigning against bauxite mining at the Gandhamardhan hills in western Orissa – are being probed by the Orissa human rights commission acting on a complaint from the families of the victims. Their bodies were found at the Borasambadar forests at Paimkal in western Orissa on 28 December 2010 and the police had claimed that the two were armed Maoists shot dead during the previous day's combat operations.

The 23 killings by the police on which no inquiry has been ordered were those of:

- two persons including a woman at Telkoi area of northern Keonjhar district on 29 December 2010;
- five persons – three women, a girl and a man – at Tamka near Kalingangar in northern Jajpur district on 1 January 2011;
- nine persons – including three women – at Kashipur-Kalyansinghpur area in the southern Rayagada district on 8 January 2011;
- two persons, both male, in the northern Jajpur district; and
- five persons, all male, in the northern Sundargarh district on 8 and 11 February.

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