

Nepal: Protect human rights defenders from "disappearance"

Human rights defenders in Nepal have found themselves on the front line of the country's human rights crisis.

As a result of their efforts to investigate widespread human rights violations committed by the security forces and the Maoist opposition, they have often found their lives, and those of their families, in danger. Many human rights defenders have been arbitrarily arrested; some have been tortured; others have "disappeared".

They have been working to investigate a swathe of abuses. Since the breakdown last year of peace talks between the Nepalese government and the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) (Maoist) the country's security forces have launched a counter-insurgency campaign which has resulted in "disappearance", extrajudicial execution, and torture including rape, all carried out without the threat of punishment. The CPN (Maoist) have been responsible for scores of assassinations, bombings and mass abductions.

These are just a few of the human rights defenders who have been targeted:

- **Jeetaman Basnet**, a 28-year-old lawyer and investigative reporter for the Sagmarmatha Times newspaper, was last seen on 4 February 2004, talking to three people in army uniform. It is thought that his journalistic enquiries may have falsely implicated him in rebel activities.
- Security forces arrived at the house of human rights activist **Sujindra Maharjan** on 12 November 2003, and threatened his family with arrest if he did not give himself up. Three days later, five members of the security forces arrested him and drove him away. All efforts to locate him have failed.
- **Rajendra Dhakal**, aged 30, has not been seen since his arrest by police on 8 January 1999. A lawyer and chairman of a local branch of a national human rights association, he was arrested in the town of Jamdi, in the Tanahun district of Nepal. Police authorities continue to deny that he is in detention.

Take Action

Write to the Nepalese authorities, urging them to ensure the safety of those who speak out for justice. You could base your letters on the sample below.

[4-letter]

Dear Prime Minister

Several human rights defenders have been arrested by your security forces since the breakdown of the ceasefire last year.

Some have been held illegally in army barracks. Some have been tortured and ill-treated. Others, like Jeetaman Basnet, Sujindra Maharjan and Rajendra Dhaktal, have "disappeared" and have not been seen since their arrest.

I urge you to investigate all allegations of torture, ill-treatment and "disappearance" brought before you, and to punish those responsible for such abuses. All human rights defenders who are in detention must be released, unless they are charged with recognizably criminal offences.

I also call on you to stop your country's security provisions being used to prevent legitimate political expression and to harass and arbitrarily detain peaceful protestors, including human rights defenders; and to ensure that your government's commitments to human rights, enshrined in "His Majesty's Government's commitment to the implementation of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law", are implemented, in particular your commitment to respect human rights defenders.

Finally, I urge you to strengthen the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), providing it with access to detainees held in army custody, and to ensure that compensation is paid to human rights defenders who have been arbitrarily arrested or detained, and to the families of those who remain "disappeared".

Yours.

Appeals to:

Sher Bahadur Deuba
Prime Minister
Prime Minister's Office

Singha Durbar, Kathmandu, Nepal

Telegram: Prime Minister, Singha Durbar, Kathmandu, Nepal

Fax: + 977 1 4 227 286 (faxes may be switched off outside office hours, 5 and a half hours ahead of GMT)

Salutation: Dear Prime Minister
