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Amnesty International delegation reports on deteriorating human rights situation

Amnesty International today expressed its shock at the Nepalese government's inaction in the face of the deteriorating human rights situation in the country, now reaching alarming levels.

An Amnesty International delegation visited the country to research reports of increasing human rights violations since the start of a police operation on 26 May 1998 to "flush out" armed activists of the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN - Maoist).

They found evidence of systematic use of severe torture, including of women held in police custody, committed by police constables as well as senior level police officers at district and regional police headquarters.

The delegation also gathered information on a number of cases of "disappearance" where suspects had been seen being arrested by police, but the latter subsequently denied their detention. It also interviewed people who had suffered abuse after being kidnapped by armed members of the CPN (Maoist).

In meetings with the Prime Minister, Home Minister and Inspector General of Police, Amnesty International delegates -- comprising Mr. Jan Borgen, Director of the Norwegian Section of Amnesty International and Ms Elizabeth Rowsell, a member of staff of the International Secretariat in London -- expressed concern at the level of impunity prevalent amongst law enforcement officials.

During these talks, the government showed a lack of commitment to investigate reports of human rights violations. The delegation called on the government to ensure the police force stops murder, torture, "disappearance" and arbitrary detention of people suspected of supporting the armed Maoist movement, as well as members and supporters of mainstream political parties.

As a long term measure aimed at establishing a mechanism of impartial investigation, the delegation urged the Prime Minister in particular to honour his commitment to establish the National Human Rights Commission which has been awaited for more than two years.

There is a need for a clear and integrated approach to solving the deteriorating human rights situation which can only be achieved if all basic human rights are guaranteed. The government should ensure respect for the right to life, the right not to be tortured and the right to full and equal

participation in the political and economic life of Nepal.

The organisation is concerned about the apparent increasing politicization of the issue of human rights and by a suggestion that reports of human rights violations are only investigated by the government when raised by MPs in parliament. The Home Minister and Inspector General of Police should take responsibility for investigating all reports of human rights violations, making the findings public and taking action against the perpetrators. The issue of impunity urgently needs to be addressed.

The delegation also asked the Home Minister to take personal responsibility to establish the facts behind several "disappearances" after arrest by police, including that of Mohan Prasad Oli of Mahatepuri village, Banke District, in June this year. They were told that, contrary to the evidence obtained by Amnesty International, Mohan Prasad Oli had been abducted by CPN (Maoist). While Amnesty International has consistently condemned abuses by members of the CPN (Maoist) the delegation reiterated Amnesty International's appeal for an immediate and impartial investigation into his "disappearance".

The Amnesty International delegation also met a variety of human rights organisations. It found that human rights defenders' activities are being curtailed by government authorities and armed members of the CPN (Maoist). Relatives of torture victims filing cases under the Torture Compensation Act and lawyers defending people suspected of Maoist activities have been threatened by police.

The visit also included meetings with members of the diplomatic missions in Nepal to report on the mission findings. The delegation stressed the need for the Nepalese government to acknowledge that police excesses were more widespread than is being admitted and to check the continuing spell of violence in the country.

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