

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

AI index: ASA 20/006/2009
19 June 2009

India: Authorities should avoid excessive use of force in West Bengal

Amnesty International calls on the Indian authorities to act with restraint and avoid excessive or unnecessary use of force against *adivasi* (indigenous) communities who are protesting against police violence. These communities have erected blockades in Lalgarh area, 170 km from Kolkata, in West Bengal.

Amnesty International has received reports that more than 40 people, including women, sustained injuries as over 800 paramilitary personnel used teargas and rubber bullets to disperse protestors and cleared blockades erected by the *adivasi* communities and armed Maoist rebels.

Amnesty International reminds the authorities that India has international treaty obligations to protect the right to life at all times. The state authorities must ensure that security forces comply with international human rights standards on law enforcement, in particular those relating to the use of force.

Amnesty International calls on state and federal authorities to ensure that all state officials, including police personnel, who are suspected of human rights abuses, including excessive use of force, torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, are brought to justice in proceedings that meet international standards of fair trial and do not impose the death penalty.

Amnesty International also appeals to all political organisations in Lalgarh, including the Communist Party of India (Marxist) which leads the ruling Left Front in West Bengal, the *adivasi*-led People's Committee against Police Atrocities and the armed Maoists to denounce and refrain from committing human rights abuses and to adhere to the fundamental principle of humanity as reflected in international humanitarian law.

Background

At least 11 people have died, and several others have been abducted, during a wave of political violence in Lalgarh in the last seven months. Those killed included seven members and supporters of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and four people belonging to the People's Committee against Police Atrocities.

Allegations that police carried out atrocities against the *adivasi* community are at the heart of the protests. The violence followed alleged violations

perpetrated by the state police after a landmine blast, set off by alleged armed Maoists, targeting the convoy of West Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadev Bhattacharya. The police response allegedly included arbitrary detention of seven persons, three of them schoolboys, for several days and excessive use of force on at least 50 persons including 8 women. No inquiry was held so far into the alleged violations.

Ends

Public Document

To request an interview with an Amnesty International spokesperson or for more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566 or email: press@amnesty.org

International Secretariat, Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW, UK www.amnesty.org