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Nepal: Restrictions on freedom of movement continue

Amnesty International today expressed concern at reports that the Nepal authorities continue to impose severe restrictions on people's freedom of movement.

"Today's action by the security forces to stop three leading legal experts, including a former Supreme Court judge and the President of the Bar Association, from flying to Delhi to attend a conference on the constitutional crisis in Nepal is an ominous sign of the government's lack of political will to live up to several commitments it has made to the international community recently," Purna Sen -- Director of the Asia & Pacific Program of Amnesty International stated.

The action comes barely two days after the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR) adopted a resolution on Nepal calling on the authorities "to immediately reinstate all civil and political rights; to cease all State of Emergency related and other arbitrary arrests; to lift the far-reaching censorship; to restore freedom of opinion, expression and the press as well as the freedom of association; to immediately release all detained political leaders and activists, human rights defenders, journalists and others; to allow all citizens to enter and exit the country freely and to respect all international and national obligations as well as the 25 points of the commitment of 26 March 2004, as freely undertaken by Nepal."

Amnesty International noted one promising, positive development -- today's release of 60 prisoners of conscience by the Nepalese government.

Background

More than two months after King Gyanendra's seizure of power and imposition of a state of emergency on 1 February, the human rights situation in Nepal continues to deteriorate. Fundamental rights remain suspended, widespread arrests continue and the media is operating under strict censorship. In addition, fighting between the security forces and Maoist rebels has increased and a disturbing new phenomenon of vigilante violence has emerged.

Since 1 February, in an apparent effort to reduce human rights monitoring and reporting, the authorities have prevented a number of human rights defenders from leaving Kathmandu. Their names are reportedly on a list of those whose travel is restricted, which has been compiled by the security forces.

Under strong international pressure at the UNCHR, the Nepal government signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights providing for deployment of an international human rights presence in Nepal. This mission will monitor and report on human rights abuses in the conflict. Amnesty International and other human rights organizations have called for the

rapid and full deployment of the monitors and for them to have full freedom of movement.

For years, Nepal has made numerous human rights commitments but failed to implement them in practice. A 25-point commitment paper submitted to the UNCHR in March 2004 remains largely unimplemented. With the adoption of the MoU and the resolution on Nepal at the UNCHR, there is now have a clear commitment by the government of Nepal and the Maoists, which must be translated into sustained and real cooperation by both sides.

Public Document

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