

# IRIN

## WEB SPECIAL

December 2005

### *Between Two Stones* *Nepal's decade of conflict*



In times of crisis or disaster, humanitarian workers and governments need an accurate account of events and situations on the ground. An information service that focuses on a daily basis on humanitarian issues in Africa, Asia and the Middle East, IRIN seeks to satisfy that need. Our aim is to bridge the information gap between decision makers, humanitarian workers and the people they are trying to help.

For more information on our services visit our website at: [www.IRINnews.org](http://www.IRINnews.org)



## inside this issue

### 1. Lead Articles

- Overview analysis: A people's war? .....3
- The political context of the crisis in Nepal .....4

### 2. Features

- The growing threat of HIV/AIDS .....7
- The conflict's dangerous impact on health services .....9
- Decades of damage to education .....10
- Food insecurity and market access in contested districts .....11
- Confronting human rights violations .....13
- Children on the frontline .....16
- Escaping rural violence and hardship – the reality of displacement .....18
- Terrorism or liberation? Life in a rebel-held village .....20

### 3. Interviews

- Interview with United Nations Resident Representative in Nepal, Matthew Kahane .....22
- Interview with human rights activist, Subodh Pyakhurel .....24
- Interview with the editor of the *Nepali Times*, Kunda Dixit .....25
- Interview with the Royal Nepalese Army's former spokesman, Brigadier-General Deepak Gurung .....27

### 4. Special testimonies

- Testimony by a victim of Maoist torture .....29
- Testimony by a victim of torture at the hands of the army .....29

### 5. Links & References ..... 31

### 6. Maps ..... 34

### 7. How to contact IRIN ..... 36

## 1. Lead Articles - Overview analysis: A people's war?



A young female Maoist rebel. Since the start of the conflict between Maoist rebels and Nepali security forces in February 1996, an estimated 12,000 people have been killed.  
Credit: Sagar Shrestha/IRIN

Nepal's brutal conflict between Maoist insurgents and security forces has exacted a heavy toll on the civilian population, especially those in contested hill districts, many of whom already live near or on the global poverty threshold. An estimated 12,000 people have been killed since the Maoist faction of the Communist Party of Nepal, officially launched its "people's war" in February 1996.

A local human rights watchdog claims that a quarter of those deaths occurred in 2004, after an escalation in the violence following the collapse of a ceasefire the year before.

Nepal faced the prospect of renewed conflict in January 2006, when armed followers of the Maoist faction of the Communist Party of Nepal ended a four-month unilateral ceasefire. The Maoists launched their armed rebellion against the state in 1996 and ended their latest ceasefire in response to King Gyanendra's failure to reciprocate. Nepalis living outside the capital, Kathmandu, remain hostage to a climate of impunity that has evolved over the last decade. They are caught between local Maoist commanders and a security regime that has often operated beyond the confines of the law.

### Protection crisis

Civilians, especially those in heavily contested rural districts, have been exposed to a catalogue of abuses at the hands of both sides. The Maoists have killed, intimidated or coerced local government officials, such as local village leaders, teachers and political workers. They have harassed civilians suspected of having government or military sympathies and abducted school children into their indoctrination programmes. They have also restricted freedom of movement of civilians, extorted money or demanded taxes for goods and services. This has had implications for agricultural and livestock production, food security and market access.

Equally bleak is the record of the armed forces and police, with evidence of arbitrary arrests, detention, disappearance, torture and summary executions. The Nepalese army has been singled for particular criticism by the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture. In the last two years, Nepal has also had the highest number of disappearances reported to the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances.

The physical and psycho-social effects on families, children and women who have witnessed or been subject to violations and attacks will reverberate for years to come. Teachers and school children have been badly affected. The head teacher of a school in Rukum district, 300 km northwest of Kathmandu, said that children could barely concentrate on their studies for fear of being abducted by Maoists, or being visited by the security forces. "Those who think they are targets for abductions, or torture or mishandling, may just leave for India," he said.

Local human rights groups have been limited to what they can achieve in such a hostile context. However, their morale was boosted with the arrival of a UN human rights team in May 2005. Headed by Ian Martin, the UN's Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has been tasked to monitor and report on human rights violations related to the conflict. Martin said that while the Nepalese army was not always happy with the mission, cooperation was forthcoming, especially on access to detainees in army custody. "At scrutiny here is the performance of the RNA [Royal Nepalese Army]. And they take pride in their UN peacekeeping role – so I think we have considerable influence," he said.

### Pockets of vulnerability

While aid officials have maintained there is not a humanitarian crisis in Nepal, there is genuine concern that local conditions could deteriorate to warrant greater assistance. Local communities were "very vulnerable, very poor and could be pushed over from a tolerable, manageable situation into a real crisis," said Mark Segal, conflict adviser with the Department for International Development in Kathmandu.

In Rukum district, farmers complained that their greatest obstacle was the ability to move freely about the district. The Maoists restricted movement, especially to the army-controlled town. This has deprived farmers of vital supplies, seeds, the ability to graze livestock unhindered, and most importantly, access to the local market.

### Displacement and migration

An estimated 100,000 to 200,000 people are thought to have been internally displaced. Largely from rural communities, they have fled from targeted attacks, violence and increased economic hardship. The majority live with relatives in temporary abodes, or on abandoned plots in district or regional towns, or in the capital. Few statistics are available, not least because most displaced people would not want to attract the attention of the security forces. Up to 2 million people are thought to have left, migrating to India or beyond.

Women displaced by conflict were especially vulnerable. The coordinator of a local NGO in Rukum district, said that a number of displaced women had resorted to distilling alcohol and to being sex workers. This phenomenon was likely to increase if the conflict continued. Human trafficking across the border with India had also increased, according to a local NGO monitoring movement of girls.

### Future humanitarian action?



It is believed that 100,000 to 200,000 people have been internally displaced by the conflict. Up to two million are thought to have fled the violence by migrating to India and beyond.  
Credit: David Gough/IRIN

According to one aid official, Nepal lay on a line between sudden humanitarian crisis on the one hand, and reconciliation to the conflict on the other. Aid officials have been paying close attention to political developments in Kathmandu. Most are aware that unless there is a resolution to the political impasse, ongoing assistance can offer little more than "a holding pattern".

It was unrealistic to think that a major difference could be made to the conditions of the population until there was peace, said Segal. "Peace is the thing. It is the continuation of the conflict which is really destroying or limiting the impact of development to improve people's lives," he said.

### Political stand-off

Analysts in Kathmandu have claimed that ending the tremendous suffering and misery of the Nepali people is not impossible. Kunda Dixit, prominent editor of the

Nepali Times, said that ending the military stalemate and political deadlock required "a bit of vision and statesmanship on the part of the king, and some understanding on the rebel side that violence and conflict is not going to lead them anywhere".

The Maoists appear to have understood this message. Analysts in Kathmandu claim that the February 2005 royal coup has presented the insurgents with a chance to enter mainstream politics. In September 2005, the Maoist leadership announced a unilateral ceasefire, which eased conditions for those living in contested areas. In November, the Maoists met the seven main opposition parties in New Delhi and agreed on a peace process that would restore democracy and end direct rule by the monarchy. Despite peace-seeking efforts from the united front of Maoist and other political parties by extending the ceasefire and by holding one of the largest pro-democracy rallies ever held in the capital in early December, King Gyanendra, failed to respond. The Maoists curtailed their ceasefire at the end of the year resulting in the official resumption of conflict at the start of 2006 with dire socio-economic and humanitarian implications for the new year.

What happens next in Kathmandu is likely to determine the course of the conflict. The resumption of fighting between Maoist insurgents and the security forces will have a direct impact on communities in rural districts. However, even a protracted stalemate will pose challenges for donors and aid agencies trying to reach the most affected. Unless there is marked improvement in the political and military situation, the need for more intensive humanitarian engagement may grow.

## The political context of the crisis in Nepal



Pro-democracy rally in Kathmandu, protesting at the suspension of government by the king.  
Credit: Naresh Newar/IRIN

The 1 February 2005 takeover of executive powers by King Gyanendra has led to a new era of uncertainty in the tiny mountain kingdom of Nepal. The king now rules the impoverished country of 25 million directly as chairman of the Council of Ministers.

Analysts from a pre-democracy era, including elderly vice-chairmen who helped the king's father establish a party-less political system in the 1960s.

The detention of other political leaders has worsened relations between political parties and the king. King Gyanendra has said he wants to restore democracy, but the government he heads has censored the press and stifled criticism by non-governmental organisations.

The decision by the king to assume direct rule is the latest move by the monarch to undermine democracy in the country. Parliament was dissolved in May 2002 and elections - planned for November of the same year - remain postponed.

The king's cabinet consists of administrators and poli-

Elected local governments in close to 4,000 villages and 75 districts, ended their terms in office in July 2002. No local elections have been held since. The Nepali government has announced the holding of municipal elections in Nepal's 58 urban areas on 8 February 2006, but key parliamentary parties have said they are not participating. Along with Maoists, they have also said they plan to disrupt voting.

The political vacuum and lack of elected representatives in government has helped Maoists gain support among many people who feel robbed of democracy and view the king as an antiquated authoritarian figure.

As a result, Nepal remains entangled in a three-way fight between the monarchy, political parties and Maoists who say they are fighting to establish a communist state. In November 2005, the Maoists and the parties closed ranks to oppose the monarchy.

### Recent political developments

The king has banked on growing public frustration over the poor performance of Nepal's political parties, with his direct rule beginning after three years of consolidating his authority.

Political groups in Nepal have a history of division and mistrust, and have been accused of failing to put the interests of the country ahead of their own ethnic or regional interests.

Nepal's recent political history unfolded in 1990 after popular protests forced late King Birendra - King Gyanendra's elder brother - to agree to a constitutional monarchy in April of that year. A new constitution was drawn-up in November 1990, and general elections held in May the following year.

The elections returned the Nepali Congress party to power with a simple majority, but fighting within it caused the government to collapse in mid-1993. Elections in November 1994 brought in a hung parliament, with the unified Marxist-Leninist faction of the Communist Party of Nepal becoming the largest party in the new parliament.

Six minority and coalition governments of different political hues, combinations and sizes, ruled Nepal between November 1994 and May 1999, when a third general election again returned the Nepali Congress party with a workable majority.

Even the post-1999 government was unable to provide a stable administration. Infighting again caused the Nepali Congress to change prime ministers three times in as many years, before the party split in mid-2002.

Another incident jolted Nepali politics in 2001. King Birendra, his entire family, and five royal relatives were killed in a bizarre shootout at the royal palace on June 1, after which the present King Gyanendra was enthroned.

Frustrated at what he saw as the failure of the political process, King Gyanendra began to reel in the parties, starting with the sacking of the elected prime minister in October 2002.

Parliamentary parties condemned the royal move as "unconstitutional" and launched street protests,

refusing to join all successive governments except the last one - dismissed by the king on February 1, 2005 - which represented four parties and royal nominees.

### Maoists capitalise on political chaos

Aided by political instability and lapses in governance, Nepal's Maoist insurgency, which began in a handful of districts in February 1996, spread rapidly to other parts of the country.

Increasing corruption, bad governance and the inability of governments to meet popular aspirations, meant the Maoists' manifesto of a communist utopia was easy to sell to Nepalis who felt cheated by their leaders.



Like many other women, this young girl in Khotang district, joined the Maoists to try to change the low status of Nepali women. However reports suggest that gender discrimination persists even with the Maoist movement.  
Credit: Sagar Shrestha/IRIN

The Maoists were clever enough to realise that ideology alone would not win them popular support, and began to take up issues close to the hearts of most rural Nepalis - exploitation, discrimination, poverty, corruption and inequality. Like the Taliban in Afghanistan, they brought about an

uneasy stability, though they were intolerant of dissent or even debate.

Although many Nepalis appeared to agree with the aims of the Maoists - namely an end to the absolute rule of the monarch and the introduction of a more equitable society - their methods soon alienated them from much international and local support.

Kidnappings, abductions, killings, rapes, disappearances and taxing the peasantry became widespread, along with a generalised offensive against the state that involved ambushing security forces and bombing district headquarters. Many civilians were killed in these attacks.

Then the notion that the monarchy represented continuity and stability, was dashed in June 2001 when a drunken Crown Prince Dipendra wiped out the entire royal family at the Narayanhity Palace, Kathmandu. Prince Gyanendra, the only direct member of the Royal Family who survived, was crowned king on 4 June.

An investigation said the prince carried out the killings because of a longstanding family dispute over the choice of his would-be bride, before turning a gun on himself.

### Rebel consolidation

The Maoists, who by then had expanded their presence to all of Nepal's 75 districts, saw the royal transition as an opportunity to extend their grip on the country, and launched a fresh wave of violence.

The Royal Nepalese Army was deployed to combat them and a state of emergency declared. The government issued a new anti-terrorism law giving security forces the authority to detain suspects for up to six months.

Since February 2005, the king has been subject to heavy international criticism and pressure to give up his direct rule. Several countries, notably Switzerland and Denmark, have suspended their aid. The political crisis has led to very high profile international visits from the UN and the European Troika.



Most political demonstrations by political parties are concentrated in the capital and major towns, such as this one in Kathmandu in December 2005. Many villagers have no access to national political representatives, who themselves rarely visit constituents.  
Credit: Naresh Newar/IRIN

King Gyanendra has given himself three years to restore peace and security and restart the democratic process - a huge task in a country where politics is conditioned by caste, class, poverty, religion and the exclusion of minorities.

On 17 November 2005, the Maoists and seven of Nepal's largest political parties announced an understanding to jointly oppose the monarchy. Though the modalities for implementing it remain unclear, generally the political parties have agreed to demand the holding of constituent assembly elections - a key rebel demand - and to the writing of a new constitution. For their part, the Maoists have agreed to join mainstream politics.

The rebels have also agreed to disarm under UN monitors before any constituent assembly elections are held.

Some differences between the Maoists and the political parties remain, however, unresolved. One is that the rebels want to appoint a new interim government to hold constituent assembly elections, whereas some of the parties want the last parliament, dissolved in



The government and Royal Nepalese Army are sceptical about the Maoist-declared ceasefire, saying the Maoists are buying time for military training and the purchase of weapons.  
Credit: Sagar Shrestha/IRIN

May 2002, restored to oversee such elections.

The Maoists extended their ceasefire by a month on 2 December 2005, a move aimed at supporting protests by the main parties to create pressure on the government to work towards peace. The government though had

made no peace overtures towards the parliamentary parties or the Maoists by early December.

The Maoists have categorically said they will not negotiate with the monarch until democracy is restored. On December 7, the king reshuffled the cabinet, tasking it to hold February's municipal elections.

So in 2006, Nepal faces two differing scenarios: While the government wants to hold municipal elections, the parties want larger democracy restored first, a tension that could lead to increased confrontation. Alternatively, the outcome could be more peaceful, with the ceasefire and the front formed by the political parties and the Maoists, increasing public demand for peace, forcing even the king to make concessions.

## 2. Features - The growing threat of HIV/AIDS



A 30-year old woman with AIDS in Makwanpur District. Deserted by her husband and family, who considered her to be too much of a burden, she survives on few pieces of bread provided by her neighbours. Care and treatment programmes run by the government and by aid agencies often fail to reach the poorest people living with HIV/AIDS. Credit: Naresh Newar/IRIN

Four years ago, Nareshlal Shrestha took the bold step of publicly declaring that he was HIV-positive in a society that still condemns and ostracises people living with the virus. He was one of the first people in Nepal to do so. Since then, others have followed his example, believing that the only way to fight HIV/AIDS in Nepal is to take matters into their

own hands.

Shrestha and other people living with the virus in Sunsari district started "Dharan Positive" in 2002 to support each other. The group provides food and some medicines for nearly 185 people, including 32 women.

Although they have succeeded in giving each other moral support and health care services like counselling and providing medicines needed for secondary infections exacerbated by the virus, they cannot prevent their friends from dying. "So many have died in front of our eyes," recalled Shrestha.

"Our main purpose is to help each other and organise ourselves so that our voices will be heard," said Protsah Katuwal, founder of Sneha Samaj, another group of people living with the disease.

These grassroots initiatives are the only source of support and information for most Nepalese as the government has largely failed in its efforts to establish effective prevention programmes, or to support those living with the virus.

### The scope of the problem

Though the absolute number of HIV/AIDS cases in Nepal is still low, there are already epidemics within certain high-risk groups. Immediate and vigorous action must be taken now, Maiti Nepal urges, to prevent the further spread of HIV/AIDS among groups at high risk, and to stop the infection from taking more of a foothold in the population at large.

According to the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), Nepal has an estimated 62,000 people living with the virus. There are serious concerns that AIDS could be the leading cause of death by 2010 if the current HIV prevalence of 0.52 percent among 15-40 year-olds continues to increase.

UNAIDS said the rate could reach 2 percent by 2015, with HIV rapidly spreading in the most sexually active age groups. Without effective treatment programmes,

the agency said, between 10,000 to 15,000 Nepalis could die annually of AIDS-related illnesses.

Even remote areas of Nepal are affected by HIV/AIDS, with Care Nepal reporting that almost half of a small sample group of about 70 people in a remote hospital in Doti district, tested HIV-positive in 2004. Most widows under the age of 40, and more than half of them had infants under the age of one.

HIV/AIDS activists, aid workers and people living with the virus, have criticised the government's lack of commitment to addressing the epidemic.

The Nepal government has greatly underestimated the extent of the problem. The latest government statistics in October 2005 reported that there were only 5,564 HIV-positive people in the country, with 828 suffering from AIDS-related illnesses.

The government has allocated only a small portion of its national budget for HIV/AIDS intervention, and depends largely for the rest on bilateral and multilateral aid.

Activists also complain that despite financial aid and technical support from aid agencies, there is little tangible progress being made in the fight against HIV/AIDS because of a leadership vacuum in related government ministries.

Since 2002, the National AIDS Council has held only one meeting. The National Aids Coordination Committee, led by the health ministry, has failed to implement most of its national aid plans and programmes on the ground.

The National Centre for AIDS and STD Control, activists said, has been highly politicised for many years, even under Nepal's more democratic regimes.

In the last three years, the centre has changed its director nearly nine times, reportedly one of the main reasons for its failure to implement Nepal's national AIDS strategy for 2002-2006, the main objective of which was to contain the HIV/AIDS epidemic by expanding prevention programmes and introducing care and support programmes for sufferers.

Pulkit Chaudhary, senior medical officer of the National Aids Centre, said that a lack of leadership compromised the ability of Nepal to reach its Millennium Development Goals. "If we are to achieve our goal of controlling the spread of HIV/AIDS, it will be difficult without effective management," he said.

With aim of decentralising the national HIV/AIDS programmes, the government pledged to establish District AIDS Coordination Committees in all 75 of Nepal's districts so there would be an expansion of HIV/AIDS prevention activities focussing on education

and awareness among the local population.

Although coordination committees have been formed in nearly 60 districts, only two or three are reported to be functioning. The rest merely organise functions on World AIDS Day.

"In the absence of political commitment and leadership, the campaign against HIV has proved to be ineffective," said an official from one of the key funding agencies on condition of anonymity.

The government has also been criticised for neglecting the care and treatment of people living with the virus. In 2005, the administration planned to provide antiretroviral treatment to nearly 750 patients, but records show that only 150 in Kathmandu and 11 in Nepalganj have received treatment.

### Impact of the conflict

"The ongoing Maoist insurgency and resulting conflict in Nepal have created large numbers of internally displaced people as well as economic and social instability, which may also contribute to the spread of HIV/AIDS," said a report by United States Agency for International Development, a key bilateral donor to Nepal and the lead donor for family planning and HIV/AIDS programmes in the country.

Various reports suggest that most at risk are the young girls and women who have fled home due to fear of the Maoist rebels, and have ended up working in restaurants and dance bars where sexual exploitation is notoriously high, according to a local NGO, Saathi.

In addition, Nepali girls are also trafficked to Indian brothels. According to Women Acting Together for Change - a local NGO - there are an estimated 150,000 to 200,000 Nepali child sex workers in Indian brothels. Around 70 percent of them who returned to Nepal were HIV-positive.

Another 40 percent of Nepal's 30,000 intravenous drug users are also said to be HIV-positive. According to a Family Health International study conducted by New Era and STD/AIDS Counselling and Training Service, the figures are alarming - especially in Kath-

mandu, where nearly 68 percent of such drug users tested HIV-positive.

The conflict has fuelled displacement and large-scale male migration to Kathmandu, India and further a field for work. According to hospital records, many male migrant labourers are HIV-positive when they return to their villages.

UNAIDS said at least 10 percent of 2-3 million Nepali migrant workers in India, are estimated to be HIV-positive, and many infect their spouses when they return home. This has been seen most notably in Maoist-controlled districts such as Accham, Kailali and Doti, where around 6-10 percent of migrant labourers were reported to be HIV-positive.

"These men are now infecting spouses and others in many parts of the country. By pushing rural residents from war-torn areas to the capital, Kathmandu, the conflict may have helped spread HIV/AIDS," said a report on HIV in Nepal, "Is the Violent Conflict Fuelling the Epidemic?". The report was published in July 2005 by a group of international and local specialists.

Some activists are however, more optimistic that infection rates can be contained, particularly if the ceasefire declared in September by the rebels continues to hold.

"If we can address the issue effectively and implement our national programmes as planned, we can control HIV/AIDS," explained Biswo Khadka from Maiti Nepal, which has a special care and support programme for children and women living with HIV/AIDS.



## The conflict's dangerous impact on health services



Rural health services are negligible and the problem has worsened as a result of the conflict. The women and children pictured here in Dharan city had to travel from their village for their medical check-up as the village health post had neither a health worker nor proper medicines.  
Credit: Naresh Newar/IRIN

The three-day journey for 52 year-old Maniram Rai and his wife was almost too much to bear. In agony with stomach pains and a high fever, Rai's condition worsened after walking all the way from Lekharka village in the remote, hilly Bhojpur district, to reach the Nepali city of Dharan.

"This is the reality in our village. We can't even get proper care, there are no medicines or doctors,"

said Rai from his bed at the BP Koirala Hospital in Dharan, where he has been gradually recovering after a week in intensive care.

Although Nepal's government claims that national healthcare has hardly been affected by the nine year-old Maoist conflict, health workers, especially those in vulnerable rural communities, tell a different story. They say that the rebellion has had a major impact on the delivery of basic health provision in many parts of the Himalayan kingdom.

Nepal has always had a marginal health service - villagers have had to travel to urban areas and towns for proper care for generations. The government has registered some successes in recent years, including progress in combating tuberculosis, leprosy, Vitamin A deficiency and measles.

But the bigger picture, particularly for rural Nepalis, is far less encouraging. The conflict has left most government-run rural clinics - known as health posts - short of medical supplies and skilled staff.

"The health posts are there only in name. We have to take all the pain of travelling to the cities," explained 65-year-old Jamandwoj Rai, who spent four days getting to hospital in Dharan for treatment on a septic leg wound. "I'm lucky that I had some money to travel here, but many of our poorest villagers die at home," he added, explaining that his village had not seen a single doctor or trained government health worker for more than a year.

"There is definitely a negative impact on our health system because of the war, especially due to the unwillingness of skilled health workers and doctors to visit villages controlled by the Maoists," said Paras Pokhrel, a doctor from Dharan's community medicine programme.

Although his unit has made efforts to send nurses and doctors into at least six districts where the health situation is at its worst, most are very reluctant to be

based there, despite the fact that few health workers have actually lost their lives in the conflict. "I am very afraid. There is no security outside the main towns. I do want to help people in need, but I have my own safety to consider," one nurse in Dharan explained.

According to statements by Maoist leaders, health workers have never been targeted. Despite this reassurance, many rural health staff point out that the government has not offered such guarantees, and say they fear being caught-up in clashes between the rebels and security forces.

Villagers in many parts of the country have no choice but to rely on the network of Female Community Health Volunteers, a well-meaning but untrained and under-resourced corps of rural carers.

When it comes to complications in pregnancy and childbirth, most volunteers are out of their depth. The Ministry of Health has estimated that nearly 4,500 women die every year from pregnancy-related complications, mostly due to lack of skilled birth attendants and the absence of emergency services and equipment in rural health centres.



Khalanga airport, Rukum. Flights are often the only means of transport to reach the cities from remote villages, but they are unreliable and frequently cancelled. Only a few months ago in Rukum, a woman suffering from a pregnancy-related problem who needed emergency treatment, died when the flight did not arrive.  
Credit: Naresh Newar/IRIN

The Maoists say they have established a health infrastructure in the rural areas they control, but villagers in some rebel areas who spoke to IRIN said this was largely propaganda and that there were very few clinics or doctors organised by the insurgents.

It is not just treatment facilities that have suffered, all-important health education programmes have also stopped in many rural parts of Nepal. "The indirect impact of the conflict is of more serious concern. Due to immense psychological fear among health workers, health education and supervision for preventive healthcare measures have been greatly reduced," said safe motherhood expert Indira Basnet in Kathmandu.

In a country with a very low literacy rate, awareness of basic health practices - like washing hands and disposing of human waste properly - is considered of crucial importance in reducing the big killers: diarrhoea, malaria, encephalitis and acute respiratory infections. According to the Ministry of Health, diarrhoea kills about 30,000 children every year, and acute respiratory diseases affected nearly a million children all over the country.

Massive internal displacement and migration to

Nepal's cities due to the war, have also taken their toll on the population. A record number of children now suffer from malnutrition. According to UNICEF, about 48 percent of children under the age of five, suffer from being underweight.

"The country's health services at village level have been pushed 10 years back," said Pokhrel, who added

that the country's health indicators would further deteriorate if the conflict continued.

## Decades of damage to education



The climate in schools for many children is one of fear, both of abductions by Maoist rebels and of the soldiers stationed outside schools by the security forces. The lack of teachers in schools also means that many classes are not held.  
Credit: Naresh Newar/IRIN

The decision in late November 2005 by Nepal's Maoist rebels to form an alliance with the main political parties against King Gyanendra, has met with muted enthusiasm from many Nepalis, in particular teachers and school students who say that even if peace does come to the Himalayan kingdom,

it will take years for Nepal to put its education sector right again.

"The situation with regard to education has become so bad that it will take several decades to restore what we had achieved before the conflict started," said Dipendra Roka, a schoolteacher in Salle village in Rukum district, about 300 km northwest of the capital, Kathmandu.

Like many rural hill districts, Rukum has experienced very low school attendance since the conflict started, due to abductions by rebels who have often forced students and teachers to march to the remotest parts of the district to attend their cultural and "revolutionary orientation" programmes.

Most schools in the district are also running out of books, other teaching materials and even decently-built classrooms, as the government has failed to use the education budget to maintain infrastructure and supplies, local teachers say.

According to the United Nations Children's Fund, Nepal has an adult literacy rate of only 42 percent. The percentage of illiterate females, it says, is far higher.

Although 82 percent of children are officially enrolled at Nepal's schools nationally, almost half of them are reported by NGOs to drop out of school during the first two years. Nearly three-quarters leave before the completion of primary school. Only around 10 percent complete secondary school education.

Due to a lack of government presence in most rural areas, regional education offices in Rukum, Rolpa,

Kalikot and several other Maoist-controlled districts, especially in west Nepal, have not been able to implement their education programmes according to the national curriculum.

"Many children in the villages are dropping out of schools due to a lack of teachers and proper education materials. The conflict has been the main cause," added Roka, who worked as a Maoist cadre for two years after the rebels forced him to join their ranks.

His main job was to visit schools and expose both teachers and students to the Maoists' ideology. Five months ago, he escaped and took refuge in a district centre, where he now works at the high school. He fears for his life: if Maoist insurgents find him, he says he will be executed for desertion.



Teachers have been especially targeted in the conflict, allegedly by both rebels and the army. Narjit Basnet's hand was chopped off by Maoist rebels. He still manages to teach the children at a community school.  
Credit: Naresh Newar/IRIN

Since the conflict began in Nepal in February 1996, teachers in the villages have been targeted by both the rebels and the security forces. According to the Informal Sector Service Centre (INSEC), a leading Nepali human rights group, at least 141 teachers have been killed during the conflict - 84

by the rebels, and the rest by the security forces.

Another report by the Education Journalists' Group, a local NGO, revealed that over 200 teachers said they had been tortured by both sides. It added that around 156 teachers disappeared after they were abducted by rebels, or arrested by the state.

"These attacks on teachers are meant to lead to the control of the education system, to use it to indoctrinate children," said Keshab Bhattarai, president of the Teachers' Union of Nepal.

Around 19,000 public primary schools in the rural areas serve nearly 3.4 million children. Schools have shut down when rebels wanted to pressure the government to release rebel cadres, or force some other concession from the Kathmandu government.

The government has also been criticised for stationing army and police personnel inside school compounds, exposing students to crossfire when Maoists attack the security forces.

According to a 2005 report by the Asian Centre for Human Rights, both the Royal Nepalese Army and the Maoists have been involved in direct attacks on schools. It reported incidents of students having been killed in aerial bombing, as well as random firing into school compounds where Maoists were organising cultural programmes.

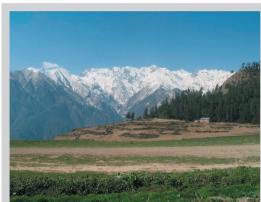
Similarly, there were also reports of the Maoists targeting schools. The Asian Centre for Human Rights recorded that between February and May 2005, the rebels attacked 23 schools, bombing six rural schools in one day alone in Rukum.

Private boarding schools in urban areas have not escaped unscathed. Many have been targeted and subject to extortion. According to local NGO, Child

Workers in Nepal, nearly 3,000 schools were closed between January and October 2005, due to strikes called by the Maoist's student's union.

"Our only hope now is [to have] proper government in place. Only a peaceful resolution to the conflict can save education of our children," explained teacher Narjit Basnet, whose left hand was chopped off by the Maoists several years ago after he refused to join them. "All I have now is my strong will to teach my students to the best of my ability," he said at his class in the rundown school in Salle.

## Food insecurity and market access in contested districts



Most mountain districts, like Humla, pictured, are regarded as food deficit areas. Humla has one of the worst food deficits in the country and the Human Development Index of the area is believed to be one of the lowest in the world.  
Credit: Naresh Newar/IRIN

Food shortages during the pre-harvest seasons of March and August have been part of life in rural Nepal for decades. Since the start of the Maoist insurgency in 1996, analysts have been concerned about the impact of the conflict on a rural population that already lives near or below the global poverty

threshold.

Until recently, much of the available information in Nepal on the impact of conflict on food security, agricultural production, nutritional status and market access has been largely anecdotal. A recent exception to this is vulnerability monitoring by the World Food Programme (WFP), which started in the far and mid-western districts of Nepal in October 2002.

WFP data offers a broad insight into the scale of the problem. Earlier this year, this UN agency reported that 39 of Nepal's 75 districts were food-deficient, with serious constraints to food access in many mountain districts. An estimated 60 percent of rural households could not produce enough food to meet their basic requirements and were in need of supplementary help.

Identifying what food deficits result from conflict, as opposed to chronic underdevelopment, has been difficult.

In September 2005, a non-government organisation's (NGO's) field assessment found that the nutritional and health status of people varied markedly depending on the area visited. It also confirmed that the conflict had been a catalyst for the deterioration in the living conditions of most of the population.

An earlier study, conducted by David Seddon and Jagannath Adhikari in 2003, challenged some preconceptions. The exodus of young people from rural Nepal has long been held as a cause of agricultural decline. It has also been suggested that food security was made much worse due to livestock depletion by the Maoists or security forces.

In fact, Seddon and Adhikari maintain that farming has been kept up by elders who have largely remained on the farms, while the depletion of animals has affected specific communities, but has not been a general phenomenon.

Instead, the study found that by far the most significant impact of the conflict on food security, has been the reduction in physical movement, which has "reduced the volume and value of goods transported and services provided".

### Market access in Rukum District

Lack of access was confirmed by local farmers in Nepal's Rukum district. While they had little trouble working the fields, their greatest obstacle was the inability to move freely around the district. This had deprived them of vital supplies, seeds, the ability to graze livestock unhindered, and most importantly, access to the local market.

Speaking anonymously, farmers in a village 4 km from the district headquarters, Musikot, claimed local Maoists restricted the movement of people or goods in the area and especially into the army-controlled hill town.



Frequent political strikes and government curfews mean that goods from villages often will not reach markets in district centers. Many villagers, such as this goat trader in Rukum, have to take difficult and dangerous routes around the district.  
Credit: Naresh Newar/IRIN

"We are a farming community. We produce foods and take them to the district market. But we have been completely denied that access," he said.

This had put the farmers in a conundrum. "Going to market under cover of night and hoodwinking local leaders is extremely risky," he said. Farmers here were also at a competitive disadvantage, as other villages without a permanent Maoist presence were more able to smuggle food into Musikot much more easily and safely.

The entire local market had changed due to the conflict, said the farmer. They were now being instructed by local Maoists to take their produce to other parts of the district that were not under army control.

A nearby village, Sakhe, used to be the main potato supplier for the area. "Now they don't grow as many potatoes and don't bring them here [Musikot]. Instead they have to take potatoes to markets that are much further away," he said.

A local agricultural supplier based in Musikot, Prem Jung Malla, said business had been very bad over the last five years. "There's been very little movement to the district town, and the other side [Maoists] stop people from leaving the villages. People are scared of both sides of the conflict, so movement has dropped," he said.

The restrictions on movement have directly affected crop production, as farmers were not able to secure agricultural inputs at the right times of the year. Malla said the Maoist blockades could last for several days at a time, and disrupt supplies so much that farmers would not have sufficient fertiliser or inputs to maximise their yield.

"Sometimes they just miss their sowing seasons for certain crops," said Malla.

### Maoist fees and taxes

According to the farmers, the local Maoists now had control of the most profitable local businesses, including forestry and the herbal trade. The area was rich in one particular herb called yasha gumba, which was sought after in India for its medicinal properties.

To make matters worse, the farmers were being pressured to sign up with the local Maoist business committee, for which there would be a joining fee. "So

again they are raising money from us. But if we do decide to sign up with them, then the army is going to suspect us of having become Maoists," a farmer explained.

Equally unpopular was the rebels' tax regime. In the past, only traders dealing in herbs and crops would be responsible for paying taxes. Since the Maoists had arrived, ordinary farmers were also expected to pay. Maoist taxes ranged from 1 percent for food, up to 10 percent for luxury items. Alcohol was prohibited and televisions were subject to a 50 percent charge.

Local traders said there was no option but to pass these taxes on to farmers, which in turn meant they could spend less on agricultural inputs.

### Temporary Reprieve

The unilateral ceasefire introduced in September 2005 has made a significant difference to movement in the Rukum district, as the local Maoists are rarely seen. Although people are still extremely wary, goods are now arriving on time and farmers are venturing out from the villages to buy essential seeds and supplies.

A farmer from Rathamartha, Sashi Ram Oli, who had travelled to the district town to buy seed potatoes, stated that he would never have made the journey had it not been for the lull in the fighting. Prior to the ceasefire, he would rarely leave his house, except at night to check irrigation canals and livestock, he said.

His frustration was palpable: "They need to settle this conflict at the centre. I would follow whoever is in government. But my life as a village farmer is hard enough. I don't need all this."

### Food crisis or not?

WFP currently monitors over half of the 75 districts in Nepal and will be extending its monitoring to 19 new districts in 2006. WFP Representative in Kathmandu, Erika Joergensen, maintained that the results reflected chronic food insecurity in the hills and mountains, but did not point to an imminent food crisis. However, she did acknowledge the situation could deteriorate.

"We could easily see increased vulnerability in those areas where we've seen movements of people. We could certainly see increased needs if people started to move," she said.

To date, WFP's approach has been to supplement local food intake, with food-for-work and education projects. "We firmly think that the best approach is to reinforce the structures already in place," she said. This approach was well-received by local communities. The food-for-education programme had led to a rise in attendance at schools, particularly among girls, while the food-for-work schemes have led to road building in some districts.

The food security projects, which support 450,000

people per day, were considered to be "80 percent effective"; with a portion of projects suspended for "a number of reasons" - a reference to the difficulties of working in contested areas, where food aid may be blocked by one side or the other.

Joergensen said not a day went by when she did not question whether they had "got it right with the current approach". But she did not think that the current situation warranted a shift to a relief mode, which could undermine WFP's aid in support of local structures.

Due to increased insecurity since 2003, WFP and NGO partners had introduced Quick Impact Programmes to 10 badly affected districts. In addition, a new software and satellite communications technology was being introduced to enable WFP in Kathmandu to track the national food security situation more accurately - on a weekly basis, instead of every month.

Joergensen was also taking the precaution of ordering in special communications and logistics equipment in the event WFP was called upon to react quickly to a crisis.

### Pockets of Vulnerability

A field assessment by one international NGO, Action Contre la Faim (ACF), in September 2005, highlighted very different nutritional and health conditions, depending on the district visited.

Yusuf Hammache, Asia Desk officer for ACF in Paris, said the report was an opportunity to dispel polarised

views that Nepal is either a development challenge or facing an apocalyptic crisis.

For example, conditions in Kathmandu or on the Terai (the southern plain along the border with India) and some parts of the far west, were best suited to a development approach as economic exchanges and amenities continued to function relatively well, he said.

However, substantial regional variations mean Nepalis do not experience the year in the same way. Other districts had witnessed seasonal food gaps, forced or voluntary migration and increased vulnerability.

"It has become clear to us that there are pockets of vulnerability in the country and the conflict has been very much the catalyst for the degradation," he said.

Mark Segal, conflict adviser in Kathmandu for the UK's Department for International Development, maintained there could be sudden deterioration at a local level. "Some local communities are very vulnerable, very poor and could be pushed over from a tolerable, manageable situation into a real crisis," he said.

## Confronting human rights violations



There is evidence that both the Maoists and the security forces have committed human rights abuses, including extra-judicial killings, torture and disappearances. Saleha Fakir's husband, and the family's breadwinner, was shot in cold blood by Maoist rebels in Mahadiyama marketplace as an example to those thinking of disobeying the rebels' authority.  
Credit: Naresh Newar/IRIN

The breadth and nature of abuses recorded by international human rights organisations in Nepal in recent years is sobering. They include extra-judicial killing, assassination, disappearances, illegal detention and torture, as well as the bombing of civilian vehicles and other civilian targets.

Of particular concern is the extent to which children are caught up in the violence. One human rights organisation, Amnesty International, reported in March 2005 that children were being both deliberately targeted and indiscriminately killed in attacks, as well as being illegally detained, tortured, raped, abducted and recruited for military activity.

On the other side of the conflict, Maoists have targeted teachers and political workers in their attempt to uproot government influence from rural areas. They have harassed and coerced civilians, curbing their freedom of movement, extorting money and taxes.

Equally poor is the record of Nepal's Armed Police Force and the Royal Nepalese Army (RNA), with evidence of their participation in arbitrary arrest, detention, disappearance, torture and summary executions. The visit in September 2005 of the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, Manfred Nowak, concluded that the RNA carried out systematic torture of detainees, something confirmed by army officers he had interviewed.

Nepal has also had the highest recorded number of the disappearances of people reported to the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances in the last two years. The majority of these have been of people held in army custody.

Nepal's National Human Rights Commission documented no less than 662 cases of disappearances involving Nepali security forces between November 2000 and November 2003, and local human rights groups estimate that the number of people who have disappeared from the custody of the security forces has actually increased since.

Another particularly worrying development is the emergence in 2005 of village defence forces, or pro-government vigilantes. In its August 2005 "Fractured Country, Shattered Lives" Amnesty said it was alarmed at the increasing number of armed civilian groups. "These groups, which clearly enjoy considerable support from the government of Nepal, are responsible for a growing number of human rights abuses," the report stated.

In south-central Nepal, village defence forces have attacked neighbouring villages accused by government authorities of being pro-Maoist. Local human rights groups reported in one incident in February, 31 people were killed and 700 houses burnt.

Investigations by Nepali human rights groups found that these clashes heightened ethnic tensions between hill communities. Despite evidence to the contrary, the Nepalese army has denied all involvement with these village defence forces.

### Impact of Ceasefire



The military strength of both the security forces and the Maoists has increased significantly. If the ceasefire ends, civilians risk being subjected to more armed violence and more human rights abuses. Credit: Naresh Newar/IRIN

Kundan Aryal, representative of a Nepali human rights monitoring organisation, says the Maoists' unilateral ceasefire has resulted in the rebels recently killing fewer civilians. "While the Maoists have shown restraint, the king has instructed the RNA to continue military activities," he said. One analyst also said the Maoist leadership wanted to rein in local commanders.

### Rights Violations in Rukum

The impact of the human rights crisis is most apparent in contested hill towns.

Musikot is the district headquarters of the mountainous Rukum district. It is a town controlled by the Nepalese army, heavily defended with lookout posts and barbed wire. A night time curfew and blackout are enforced while searchlights comb the hillsides for intruders. Local officials expect rebel attacks to resume if the ceasefire ends.

The legacy of recent human rights abuses is obvious.

Twelve-year-old Bapita is one of 15 children who

attend group meetings instigated by local women to provide support for those orphaned by the conflict. All those attending have lost parents in targeted killings or in crossfire.

In 2002, Bapita witnessed her father being dragged out of her home and stoned to death by local Maoists as retribution for allowing his eldest son to join the army. Since then, her brother has been sent away. She says she lives in fear with her mother.

At school she is unable to concentrate on her studies. "When I'm in class, I'm constantly watching for strangers coming to school. The Maoists came once when my brother was at school, but he managed to run away. If I see them coming, I will run away too."



Many young women have been widowed after their husbands were either killed by the Maoists, or by Nepal's security forces. These two young women in Bardiya have been waiting for over five years for their husbands to return home. Security forces deny ever having arrested their husbands. Credit: Naresh Newar/IRIN

Sita Oli, a widow whose husband, a village district official, was killed by Maoists at the start of the conflict ten years ago, said that it was children who had suffered most in the conflict. "Many children, including my own, have lived with a lot of psychological trauma. I have seen many manifestations of this. Anyone with resources sends their children away."

But even relatively wealthy individuals can suffer as a result of the conflict. During a Maoist blockade in July 2005, one local businessman, Prem Malla, was asked to negotiate access with local Maoists by the chief district officer. The insurgents he met made him sign a pledge that he would give them the equivalent of US\$900.

The pledge was later found on a dead Maoist rebel by members of the government's security forces, and Malla was arrested on suspicion of collusion. He was eventually released, having been subjected to what he described as "traumatic interrogation".

Apart from their fears of abduction, of death and of arbitrary arrest, all civilians cited their lack of freedom of movement as a major source of frustration. One elderly farmer said he was too scared of armed men to risk checking his fields and irrigation canals by day, but would sneak out at night to take a look.

Anyone travelling to and from the district headquarters was subject to scrutiny by both sides. Children were closely watched. Bapita was concerned that she would be stopped and interrogated by Maoists if they knew she had visited army-controlled Musikot.

### Local Human Rights Defenders

With a weak National Human Rights Commission, and a Nepalese judiciary described by the International

Crisis Group as “constrained by royal prerogative”, monitoring violations is mostly done by local human rights groups.

Exposure to rules aimed at limiting loss of life and property in conflict, known as international humanitarian law, has been limited. In Rukum District, a local human rights monitor, Jiwan Khadka, said it has taken years for Maoists and security forces – especially the police – to accept responsibility for human rights violations.

### Improving Access

This culture of denial by both sides has slowly receded. Khadka said there was now space for local human rights workers to investigate allegations of violations. He could actually now take pictures of incidents. “There is some semblance of giving access on a particular human rights case,” he said.

Compensation for relatives of the victims of the security forces was also forthcoming in some situations. In one incident when a woman was killed by four plain-clothes policemen in her bedroom, an army colonel went on record saying she had been a Maoist. Two years later, when a local organisation provided evidence to the contrary, the army admitted it had made a mistake, and some compensation was paid.

However, there appears to be little appetite in the army to take any disciplinary action against troops for abuses. In response to allegations of torture committed by members of the RNA, army spokesman Brig-Gen Deepak Gurung told IRIN that if abuses of authority were uncovered, then the soldiers in question would be court-martialled. But human rights activists are wary of such statements, given the lack of action against soldiers known to have committed serious offences against civilians.



Village defence forces, such as this one in Ganeshpur, are reported to be committing serious human rights violations against ordinary civilians in the name of flushing out the Maoist rebels.  
Credit: Naresh Newar/IRIN

In a press release in September 2005, Human Rights Watch reported that three Nepalese army officers found guilty of torturing and murdering a 15-year-old girl, would “most likely not serve a single day in jail.”

“This tells soldiers in the Nepalese army that they won’t risk punishment if

they continue to abuse civilians,” Brad Adams, Human Rights Watch’s Asia director said.

Local human rights groups have little faith that much will change in the near future. Kundan Aryal labelled reports of disciplinary action by the army, “total lip service”.

### Insurgents

When it comes to the Maoists, there is a huge gap between the leadership and their local cadres, say observers. Public statements and commitments by the leaders of the insurgency to observing human rights, are often not respected locally.

Investigating Maoist abuse is said to be particularly difficult. “Firstly, we don’t have enough meetings [with them] as we don’t know where they are. Second, we’ve seen them, especially the grassroots workers, almost drunk with the sense of power they have. There’s a sense of impunity because they think they are untouchable, can do anything with reckless abandon and get away scot-free,” says one human rights activist.

Local human rights groups have struggled to document incidents of abuse. They have also been at risk, often harassed by both sides in the conflict.

### International Efforts

In 2004, the UN said there was a human rights crisis in Nepal. Events that followed the 1 February 2005 takeover by the king – namely the arrest of politicians, human rights defenders and journalists, as well as restrictions imposed on the press and the National Human Rights Commission - served to compound the situation.

Nepal has since seen a string of high-level visits, notably by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Louise Arbour, and by UN rapporteurs. Following the king’s agreement to allow the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to set-up office in Nepal, an advanced team of human rights monitors, headed by Ian Martin, arrived in Kathmandu in May.

A full complement of UN staff, with 35 human rights monitors and 20 support staff, should be in place in early 2006. The office’s mandate embraces all aspects of human rights, but refers specifically to conflict-related violations, such as abductions, detentions, disappearances and extra-judicial killings.

Martin said a priority had been the treatment of detainees, given the rise in the number of people arrested and whisked-off to army barracks or detention centres since 2003.

“There were a lot of disappearances and denial by the army that people were being held with no notification and no access,” he said. The army was not even bringing in their provisions under controversial anti-terrorist legislation that gives the security forces greater authority to make preventive arrests and detain people.

The UN says there has been some progress. Martin has been pressing the RNA to hold people in legal places of detention, and not in barracks. The RNA claims detainees are kept in barracks because of a lack



Despite international calls to both the government and Maoists to respect international humanitarian and human rights laws, abuses have continued. The European Union Troika, pictured, visited Nepal this year and urged both parties to respect human rights.  
Credit: Naresh Newar/IRIN

of detention facilities, a response that prompted the UN Office for Human Rights to contact Nepal's Home Ministry to establish places of secure detention so that people can be transferred to legal custody.

The army had also set up a human rights cell, and has agreed to set up a registry of who is being

detained where.

Disregard for the rule of law by the army had invoked "the strongest criticism" from the UN office, said Martin, with a recommendation that the human rights record of the conduct of individuals serving with the RNA at home, be taken into account for Nepalese involvement in future UN peacekeeping missions.

"At scrutiny here is the performance of the RNA. And they take pride in their UN peacekeeping role – so I think we have considerable influence," he said.

While the army is not always happy with the mission, it has been cooperating on access to barracks and other centres used for detention.

Extra-judicial killings was another priority, but much harder to investigate. Despite the ceasefire, Martin said that reports of the security forces killing alleged Maoist members or supporters had been received. "There are a limited number of cases, which give grounds for concern about the rules of engagement, but I don't think we can say there is a trend to this yet."

Andrew Macgregor, head of a UN sub-office, said that senior army officers had clearly issued instructions for

unfettered UN access to barracks and places of detention, in marked contrast to the lack of cooperation extended to national NGOs or the International Committee of the Red Cross, which suspended its detainee visits earlier in 2005.

Engaging the Maoists was harder. "There have been contacts, they have expressed their desire to cooperate. But our ability to engage with them is somewhat more limited. They don't have an office where you can drop in," he said.

The UN human rights office has also joined international condemnation of the king's media decree, which aims to curb press freedom.

### The future

But there is a limit to what human rights groups, local or international, can do in such a conflict-ridden environment. Matthew Kahane, UN Resident Coordinator in Nepal, said influencing the security forces and the Maoists on human rights issues "were not fields in which we could expect behaviour to change overnight".

Meanwhile in Rukum district, civilians continue to live with violence, extortion, abduction, curfews and other daily restrictions. There is little faith in a political solution and most inhabitants expect fighting to resume soon. For children like Bapita, the damage has already been done. "If it was not for this conflict, I would have a father just like any other child my age," she whispered.

## Children on the frontline

Sixteen year-old Phulkumari Sharma is one of many Nepali children to suffer in the nine years of conflict since Maoists began their rebellion against the state. In late 2004, her father, an ordinary farmer, was arrested on suspicion of supporting the rebels. He subsequently died at the hands of Nepal's security forces.

"He's dead and I don't want to say anything," said Sharma, staring blankly at the floor. Her teachers have tried hard to help her, but they say it is an impossible task.

"Children are so traumatised, and the Maoist rebels

and security forces should be blamed for making their lives this way," said Sharma's teacher Min Bahadur Pun, in Seri Gaun, a village in Rukum, one of Nepal's most conflict-ridden districts.

The village school has 50 internally displaced children who fled their villages with their parents or friends, and are living in rundown rented houses in Musikot. The town is a regional hub, a fortified centre controlled by the army and the armed police force. Hundreds of soldiers can be seen patrolling in every corner of Musikot, one of the few places still under government control in the region.





Children have been particular victims of the conflict – at the hands of both the rebels and security forces. Abduction of students by the Maoists for forced indoctrination programmes still continues even after the ceasefire was announced. They are also subject to intimidation and harassment by security force soldiers.  
Credit: Naresh Newar/IRIN

It is a disturbing sight for many children – especially those who had come to the town to escape the violence of their villages.

Rita Buda is a bright, bubbly 15 year-old who, with her parents and young siblings, gave up the family house and land to find peace and normality in the district centre.

Before they arrived in Musikot, Buda had been abducted by Maoist rebels, who forced her

to join their foot soldiers in ambushing government forces and planting bombs. The Maoists let Buda go after her mother negotiated her release, promising to send her back as an adult when she would be of more use.

The family now have to pay a “donation” to the insurgents every month, an option the rebels offer to those families who do not want their children to join up.

“They threatened to kill me if I tried to run away,” explained Buda, as she recalled her nightmarish experience. She had been kidnapped by six rebels on her way to school. They made her walk for several days to reach their destination. Then they forced her to cook and wash dishes in camp overnight.

According to a Nepali child-rights group, Child Workers in Nepal, over 400 children have been killed, around 500 injured or disabled, and as many as 8,000 have lost their parents or close relatives since the war began in 1996. About 40,000 children, it says, have been displaced from their homes.

A 2005 report by an international human rights group, Amnesty International, said Nepalese children were being killed in the conflict, as well as being illegally detained and tortured, raped, abducted and recruited for military activity.

“The situation for the children has barely changed and they continue to suffer,” said activist Tarak Dhital from Children As a Zone of Peace, a campaigning group run by local NGOs.

Although the number of deaths has decreased since the Maoists declared temporary unilateral ceasefires in September and December 2005, child abduction and the forcible indoctrination of young people has continued unabated.

Children are also more prone to death and injury from land mines and unexploded ordinance that litter areas of conflict. In October 2005, two children were killed

when a bomb left by the rebels in one of east Nepal’s most conflict-affected districts, exploded while they prodded it with a stick.

According to the Informal Sector Service Centre (INSEC), a prominent Nepali rights group, nearly 3,000 children have been abducted since the September 2005 ceasefire. Even if they are eventually released unharmed, the experience leaves deep mental scars.

“During the abductions, children are filled with terror. Their first thought is that they may get caught in the crossfire when the Maoist rebels holding them suddenly encounter the security forces,” explained activist Rupesh Nepal from INSEC.

For many of those children abducted or forced to work for the rebellion, the trauma does not end when they are released. Activists say many are subjected to interrogation and arrest by the security forces, who accuse them of collusion, or believe they may yield valuable intelligence.



Many children have been orphaned in the last ten years of Maoist conflict. Scores have become displaced, some suffering also from malnutrition and ill-health. A large number are now working as labourers in exploitative and unsafe working environments.  
Credit: Naresh Newar/IRIN

Nepal has come under severe international criticism for the failure of both the state and of the insurgents to respect and protect the rights of children.

In June 2005, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child reported that armed conflict had made it difficult to implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child, an international human

rights treaty which Nepal ratified in 1996.

“The committee notes with grave concern the reports of abduction and forcible conscription of children by the armed groups,” was one of its concluding remarks.

“The situation of children is even more disturbing today. There are more conflict orphans, more vulnerable children subject to sexual abuse and forced labour,” explained activist Biswo Khadga whose NGO, Maiti Nepal, has been sheltering a large number of female children affected by the conflict.

Most, she said, suffered from psychological effects as a result of the conflict. “Our only hope is that peace is restored soon so that more children will not have to suffer,” said Khadga.

(All names of children in this report have been changed to protect their identity)

## Escaping rural violence and hardship – the reality of displacement



A sick child at Rajana IDP (internally displaced persons) camp. An estimated 100,000 to 200,000 people are thought to have been internally displaced since the start of the conflict in February 1996.  
Credit: IRIN

Since the start of the Maoist insurgency in February 1996, an estimated 100,000 to 200,000 people are thought to have been internally displaced in Nepal. Largely from rural communities, the displaced have fled violence and economic hardship. The majority live with relatives in temporary

accommodation or on abandoned plots in towns, or in the capital Kathmandu.

Up to 2 million more may have become migrant labourers working in India or elsewhere.

Many displaced people would rather not be identified as such, lest they attract the attention of Nepal's security forces. As a result, data on internally displaced persons (IDPs) are scarce: details on where people are located and what conditions they are living under, sketchy.

When he visited Nepal in April 2005, Dennis McNamara, the United Nations Special Adviser on Internal Displacement, concluded that it was "difficult to describe who [was] being displaced by conflict".

Assessments of IDPs in Kathmandu and the city of Nepalganj, indicate especially poor nutritional status and vulnerability among IDPs. Women are thought particularly vulnerable, with local NGOs reporting a rise in sex work and trafficking as displaced women struggle to make a living.

In Rukum district, targeted attacks by local Maoist guerrillas have forced some families to seek the relative protection of the district headquarters of Musikot. Typically, individuals have been singled out by local Maoists because they are government workers, or perceived as sympathisers.

Bir Bahadur Gharti was the former village head of Hokum, three days' walk from Musikot. After six years of harassment by Maoists, he was eventually forced to leave with his family for the district headquarters when the police post in his village was abandoned. Twenty-five other families from his village, a quarter of the entire community, have fled in recent years.

"I was repeatedly attacked and beaten by the Maoists for being the headman in the village. I survived by the will of God. I should have been dead a long time ago," he said. The final straw came when local Maoists seized Gharti's house and possessions. "They even took my ornaments, silver, all my furniture, livestock and the house."

His family now lives in an empty house near a mountain top airstrip. With his extended family of 10 - ranging in age from 14 months to 60 - he moved initially into Musikot, only venturing back out to take possession of the abandoned home he currently inhabits, about 3 km away.



Baram Buda and his wife lost son in the crossfire between the security force and the rebels.  
Credit: Naresh Newar/IRIN

Gharti's family was given a resettlement grant of 6,000 Nepalese Rupees (US \$87) by the chief district officer with the approval of a local army colonel. The four women in his family were trained as weavers to provide a means of livelihood.

Male members work as wage earners, but the work is irregular. "Sometimes we carry loads for the air passengers, but there is a mad rush for these jobs. So we carry stones for construction here and there. We also work in the quarry or go down to the river and carry sand up if people need it," Gharti said.

The family expects to be displaced again, this time by the army, which wants to reclaim the house they are in. Despite its proximity to the garrisoned town, the male members of the family do not spend the night in the house. Every evening they go into the town itself before dusk, leaving behind the women and children. "We don't feel safe, even here," he said.

Gharti said there were 13 families displaced nearby, and more elsewhere in Musikot. Most of those displaced first were political workers, subjected like Gharti, to attacks by the Maoists who wanted to uproot political opposition and government presence in the villages.

More recently displaced families had gravitated to the district hub for greater security.

The conflict had affected every aspect of life, said Gharti. "There's not enough to eat, not enough for us to survive on. There is no security. You can't live with your family. A lot of families have been displaced, a lot have been broken up. Young kids are heading out. It's a total disaster."

He saw no end in sight, and said people had reached breaking point.

Rukum district is a renowned Maoist stronghold, one of the first districts to witness the rebellion in 1996. But after almost a decade of violence, the Maoists appear to have failed to win the support of the people, alienating themselves from the population.

"It's all the force of the gun. Even when you are doing your best, there have been reckless killings of anyone

who dares to raise their voice to say 'we have no money, we can't feed you'. They just kill you," Gharti said.

### Deteriorating Conditions

Nepal's first IDP camp sprung up in 2004, when a "significant number of displaced" settled in Rajhena camp, near Nepalganj. Since then, the IDPs have been subject to a stream of visits by local and international teams, although they maintain that this has led to little concrete help.

A recent survey by an international non-government organisation (NGO), Terre Des Hommes, found poor nutritional conditions among displaced children in the district, particularly those from female headed families whose husbands were working in India. The survey established that 59 percent of under threes screened were underweight and 16 percent were emaciated.

Although this was alarming, the results for Nepal as a whole are equally poor. According to the Nepal Human Development Report for 2004, "nearly 63 percent of children under five suffered from chronic malnutrition".

In another rapid assessment of displaced people in Kathmandu, a local NGO, HimRights, in June reported IDP coping mechanisms to be "near exhaustion". Overwhelmingly, the motives for leaving home were linked to the threat of forced recruitment or extortion by the Maoists, fear of reprisals by the security forces and a general climate of insecurity and poverty.

The most alarming new development with respect to displacement, has been the emergence of village defence committees in some districts. The committees are pro-government vigilante groups that the state takes no responsibility for.

In Kapilbastu district, hundreds of houses were burnt down when village defence committees attacked people suspected of being pro-Maoist. Over 30,000 people were initially estimated to have fled to India as a result of those attacks, though many have since slowly trickled back to their homes, according to aid officials in the capital.

### Migration

Gharti said he had relatives working in Qatar and Malaysia. One of his daughters said her husband had been in Malaysia for three years, but that she had not received any money from him. "He only sends letters occasionally. He might have trouble making ends meet as he has two wives," she said.

This pattern is typical, with elders staying in villages while younger people obtain visas and documents to work in India or overseas.

Local NGO groups monitoring Nepal's border cross-



The rebels have asked the IDPs to return to their villages, but they have given no assurance that returning villagers will be given back land and property the Maoists have seized.  
Credit: Naresh Newar/IRIN

ings with India, have reported large numbers of young men crossing into India, but say making sense of these movements is difficult without more data.

Some aid agencies have considered approaching Indian universities to assist them with analysing the movement

of Nepalis into India, to help better understand the dynamics.

Anjana Shakya of HimRights maintains that an exodus of young Nepali men is under way. "It's not well-documented, but there are planes full of young men leaving the country weekly for India, Qatar, Thailand and Malaysia. They have little choice."

Following the massacre of 12 Nepali hostages in Iraq in September 2004, and the subsequent riots in Kathmandu, Shakya visited India's economic capital, Mumbai, to assist Nepalis stranded by the airline suspensions. Despite the risks of travelling to Iraq, she found Nepalis barely put off by the risk of being taken hostage or killed – an indication, she said, of just how bad conditions were for many back home.

### Vulnerable Women

Sarada Dangi, coordinator of a children's NGO in Musikot, said a large number of women had been displaced to the district headquarters.

"In some instances, the husband has been killed. In others, the man goes abroad to earn money in India, Qatar or Malaysia. The women often stay behind, making them extremely vulnerable," she said.



Mankumari Bista has been an IDP since her husband was killed by rebels five years ago. Many displaced women like her are living in extreme poverty, without any support from the government or international humanitarian agencies.  
Credit: Naresh Newar/IRIN

Dangi said that she knew of at least 15 women who rented rooms in the town and distilled their own alcohol. Some of these desperate women "offered other services". They were patronised by the security forces, Dangi noted. "If the conflict continues, we're going to see a dramatic rise in prostitution as people

need to survive," Dangi said.

These conditions are also prompting women to seek opportunities abroad. Local NGO Saathi has reported an increasing number of women leaving villages. Many of these women are falling prey to traffickers.

On the busy, open border post with India, near Nepalganj, Pushpa Rana and her colleagues monitor move-

ments across the frontier. Over the last year and a half, Saathi has intercepted 70 girls being taken across the border crossing against their will or knowledge.

The NGO has also counselled 1,000 women on the risks of working in India, especially the risk of brokers who might lure them into brothels. "We just want them to be aware of that, so they don't fall prey to these characters who would exploit them," Rana said.

Rana said that the women she intercepted being taken across the border by minders had different levels of understanding as to what was happening. "About 40 percent were entirely innocent and unaware that they were crossing over into India. They had assumed that Nepalganj was in fact Kathmandu and they were travelling to another part of Nepal," she said.

Other women had been led to understand they were being taken to Arab countries. In some cases, women knew the risks, but went voluntarily as they felt they had no option.

A surprising number of women came from the district of Sindhupalchok in central Nepal, and were told that

they would be carpet weavers in Kathmandu.

Rana said there were also a number of women from the local IDP camp near Nepalganj who had been trafficked to become sex workers in big Indian cities.

The human trafficking business is not new in Nepal. "What is new is that the conflict has displaced a lot of women, many of whom are young, typically between 20 to 35 years old," Rana said. "In many cases, these women are married but don't have their husbands around. They need to look after their families. These women are prime targets for traffickers. Many of them go across the border. They are not educated and consider going across border as one way to earn a living."

## Terrorism or liberation? Life in a rebel-held village



Young female Maoists seeking refuge in a poor farmer's house. The family feels uncomfortable about their presence - they fear the reaction of the security forces if they find out that the family has sheltered rebels.  
Credit: Sagar Shrestha/IRIN

When the clock strikes four in the morning, Lambu Lama and his family rush out of their home in a Maoist stronghold of Nepal. Rebels use the storeroom at the back of Lama's house to clean and repair small arms and construct bombs. During the day, the orchards around his hilltop house echo to the sound of rifles cracking, as new recruits are initiated in the use of weapons.

Lama, his wife and two daughters, who did not invite the rebels in, have no choice but to stay away from their property for the whole day. They return home only to cook for the rebels. "It's a daily routine for us, but we get really scared when we think of what happens when the security forces arrive," said Lama as he helped his wife to wash rice before the evening meal.

The family's fear is well placed. In September 2005, a squad of Royal Nepalese Army (RNA) soldiers came to the village and beat up Lama, accusing him of aiding the rebels. "I'm lucky that I am alive and I was not

arrested," he recalled.

For many villagers like the Lama family, living in a Maoist-controlled community is fraught with difficulty. The rebels ensure that the village in question has no contact with the outside world. As a result, most residents here have never met a government official, a state teacher, nurse, development worker or a foreigner. "Not that we saw many government people before [the rebellion]," Lama noted.

Movement is severely restricted. Leaving the village without a permit from the local rebel chief, is punishable by death. Many people who fall sick are forced to leave clandestinely to seek treatment in towns. They never return, fearing retribution.

The rebels reciprocate to some extent. Between their armed operations and their drill, they help villagers graze animals, clean houses and till the rice farms. The poorest villagers are sympathetic towards the rebels, harbouring the hope that one day they help will bring rural development and provide economic opportunities.

There have been improvements for some under the rebels. Some villagers told IRIN there was now less exploitation and intimidation by absentee landlords, or those from higher castes. In many areas, the rebels have banned the traditional exploitative system of Bali Pratha through which the Dalits - the lowest caste

- had to be labourers for the higher caste, and were only paid with a few lentils and crops once a year for all their work. "Now I can make money for every effort I make," said 32-year-old tailor Tara Pariyar.



Many children in the village of Chisapani were born since the start of the Maoist rebellion in 1996. They are accustomed to witnessing conflict between armed rebels and soldiers. Counsellors are concerned that without guidance, these children will suffer psychologically in the long-term. Credit: Sagar Shrestha/IRIN

On the other hand, local communities in rebel areas have to pay tax on every item they trade in and produce, in other words, on almost every form of income. "This [tax] can be a real burden on us, we are so poor," one local farmer said.

Most of the children in Chisapani were born during the rebellion

and know no other life. "Every family has to follow every rule of the Maoists. Life is very difficult but we have managed to survive. What choice do we have anyway?" asked Prahlad Basnet, another man from Chisapani.

He appeared completely worn out and said he felt life for many had got worse since the Maoists came to stay. "We have less to eat and have to work very hard to get a square meal," he explained.

Children in the Maoist-controlled village do not bat an eyelid when female and male militants walk around, machine guns on their shoulders and strings of hand

grenades tied on their belts. The children gaze disinterestedly as Maoist militants parade and exercise twice a day.

"All we want is peace and this war should end. For how long should children and parents watch each other die?" asked 70 year-old Ramesh Pariyar.

According to those who live in Chisapani, relations with the 200-odd insurgents who live around the village are as good as they are mainly because, unlike in other regions, children have not yet been forced to join the Maoist military.

The rebels do involve the community however in other ways, having made it compulsory for every family to guard sentry posts to watch out for the security force patrols.

"We have to stand guard the whole day and night watching over the hills, and to constantly update the Maoists about any movement," complained Lama, who feels that this is a very risky task as they could be fired if the army attacked. "After we get killed, the government will report that we were terrorists killed by the security forces," he added.

### 3. Interviews

#### Interview with United Nations Resident Representative in Nepal, Matthew Kahane



Matthew Kahane, UN Resident Representative in Nepal.  
Credit: Naresh Newar/IRIN

Matthew Kahane is the United Nations Resident Representative and Humanitarian Coordinator in Nepal. He spoke to IRIN about the hardship facing Nepali villagers and the measures being taken to prepare for a possible worsening of the humanitarian situation in the Himalayan kingdom.

**QUESTION: As you know, there are people in the international community who think that we are on the brink of a humanitarian crisis? What's your view of the conditions of Nepali civilians – particularly those living in mountain areas?**

**ANSWER:** What we have had over the long term in Nepal is that a large part of the population living in the higher hills and lower mountains, those furthest from roads, rely on crops. But if you're living at that altitude, you are not going to be able to grow a large crop which feeds you all year. You grow enough to keep you going for a few months, and then some people stay, some of them go trading with Tibet, some of them bring flocks down to the Terai [the plain along the Indian border], or they go and work in India. That is fairly standard behaviour.

So drought or floods may well wipe out your crop. Or in the case of war, make it too expensive, that is, the transaction costs get too high because the Maoists tax you; or the army delays you and you don't get your goods to market; or it takes you longer to get your animals out; or you can't graze in traditional places because other people are now occupying those and don't want strangers in their neighbourhood. So, many of these traditional ways of dealing with things are much less reliable than they used to be.

On the other hand, it is very clear that many people have abandoned their villages. That is what is said by everybody who walks into the mountains. You go to villages and there are no young men or middle-aged men. They're not there. They've gone to get away from [Maoist] recruitment, or recrimination or retaliation by the army. They are also working somewhere else and are remitting money back by various channels.

Is the international community concerned? Yes, and it has been for quite a long time. When I came [to Nepal] two years ago, a number of UN agencies said to me "we believe the situation here is much more precarious than we had been hearing". This is partly because there has been this long UN engagement on the development side, and our colleagues are used to looking at development programmes. We need to look at that and ask if that [development] is indeed the situation...

...We're saying "there is a risk of humanitarian vulnerabilities greater than has been traditionally the case, to the extent that they would overtake people's coping capacities, and that we must do the very best we can to be prepared for those".

We don't have famine. We don't have massive epidemics. But we do have lots of areas where people have the most fragile access to health services. And in village health posts, if you have someone with a serious condition, they can't wait for those two to three days until the health post worker shows up with or without a full supply of medicines. If someone breaks a leg and you need to carry them for two days' walk from some remote village to a health post – that's not adequate healthcare. And you see this particularly with peri-natal problems, pregnancy problems and women's health...

**Q: Could you explain [the conditions that could precipitate a humanitarian crisis]?**

A: Our worst-case scenario had been that the government based on the political parties would fall; that there would be a takeover of an authoritarian nature with the army, in effect introducing martial law or some emergency rule; [and] the suspension of a lot of human rights. And that's exactly what we had on 1 February. It continued for a good three months, and then some of the more obvious manifestations were lifted. But much of the spirit remains as we have seen.

**Q: When IRIN visited remote villages in Rukum and talked to villagers about their hardship, the solution to the crisis very quickly came back to a political solution in Kathmandu. They maintained that there had to be a political solution before there could be any progress in the mountains. Is that your analysis?**

A: Yes, that is. One does need a political solution. And that's not a political solution of the "centre knows best

and tells the rest what to do". The political solution has to be based on "hearing what's being said and listening to it". That's not an easy thing in many countries...It's a difficult thing for many societies, many elites, and many governing classes to actually listen to what is being said. But that is very necessary here because you have large parts of the population which have been traditionally excluded from power or even participation through the caste system because of their status as ethnic minorities, [as] non-Hindu Nepalis or because they are women.

**Q: You said that the 1 February takeover by the king met the criteria for a worst-case scenario. What we've seen since is a verbal commitment to democracy but in practice a series of ordinances [decrees] coming out to control the media, a code of conduct for NGOs and so on. To what extent has the UN tried to influence that and open up a dialogue with the palace?**

A: We have been constantly engaged in discussions in many ways; through supporting civil society for discussion and through normal programmes; through repeated visits from a number of higher level officials like the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Human Rights of IDPs [Internally Displaced Persons]; the Special Rapporteur on Torture; the establishment of the large mission of the High Commissioner for Human Rights; the visit of [the Secretary-General's Special Adviser] Lahkdar Brahimi; by the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Louise Arbour, in January. And at least one meeting that the [United Nations] Secretary-General has had with his Majesty. Plus our own ongoing discussions with the political parties, with people who are with the government and whom one believes are counsellors or advisers to the palace.

The palace itself is a different issue. There we have had very little direct discussion on an ongoing basis with people that might be advisers or the equivalent. One doesn't see them around very much and I don't think they particularly wish to talk with us.

**Q: Coming back to the humanitarian situation: should it deteriorate, do you think the UN is sufficiently prepared and has systems in place to respond?**

A: That is what we're looking at by putting together the CAP [Consolidated Appeal Process], to be prepared for humanitarian crises, particularly with regard to internal displacement. Also contingency planning for health, food security and education, if more people are displaced.

We have to be ready. We can't wait until the disaster is here. And, of course, contingency planning for natural disasters. This is a country which is very subject to natural disasters. There have been many initiatives over the years to develop national capacity. Many of these work fine for a while, [but then] there isn't an earthquake, and after a few years the officers move on to their next assignment and the capacity begins to dissolve.

I think we will have the capacity if the various activities mentioned in the CAP do get the funding to get underway.

## Interview with human rights activist, Subodh Pyakhurel



Human rights activist, Subodh Pyakhurel.  
Credit: Naresh Newar/IRIN

The human rights situation in Nepal has been a matter of serious concern for most of the last nine years of conflict between Maoists rebels and the state. Rights groups have been particularly vocal since the breakdown of peace talks and the deployment of the Royal Nepalese Army (RNA) in November 2001.

Nearly 12,000 people are estimated to have been killed in the conflict since 1996. Rights groups say a large number of the victims were civilians suspected of supporting or working with the rebels. Many have disappeared after they were arrested or detained at army barracks and police stations. Maoists have also been involved in deliberate killings of civilians considered to be enemies of their "people's war".

IRIN spoke to prominent human rights activist Subodh Pyakhurel whose organisation, the Informal Sector Service Centre (INSEC), has been documenting human rights abuses ever since the rebellion began.

### **QUESTION: Is there a human rights crisis in the country today as reports suggest?**

**ANSWER:** In terms of killings, torture, abduction, forced displacement, defiance of court orders and decrees to curb the media and NGOs, yes, the human rights situation is deteriorating.

### **Q: Are the Maoists and the RNA heeding calls from international and national human rights bodies to respect human rights laws?**

**A:** There have been some recent improvements. The Maoists declared a unilateral ceasefire on 3 September 2005. According to our documentation, killings per day have gone down after the unilateral ceasefire. Having said that, abductions, extortion and other atrocities by Maoists, including some killings, prove that things are still far from normal in Nepal. Now, the number of state killings is about six times higher than the number of killing by Maoists. The state is deliberately engaged in violating rights. None of the officials in the current government has shown any inclination to stop these abuses. We had anticipated that the ceasefire would create a better environment for human rights but in vain.

### **Q: Both RNA and Maoist leaders seem to be laying all the blame for continued human rights abuses on low-ranking cadres or soldiers. Have you any information on that?**

**A:** Till now we have not received any specific information. Rather both army and Maoists have been promising, as usual, that they will monitor the abuses and take necessary action. Cases of re-arrest and defiance of court orders by the security force, as well as abduction, torture and intolerant behaviour by the Maoists towards political party workers, prove the nature and intention of both conflicting parties remains broadly unchanged.

### **Q: How has the human rights crisis affected humanitarian and development work in Nepal?**

**A:** The human rights crisis acts as an obstruction to all basic freedoms of the people, and leads to an unpredictable situation. Many NGO and donor programmes are on hold or have been scaled down due to lack of security. Even transportation and communications have been affected. So, this has caused all sorts of difficulties, particularly to humanitarian assistance.

### **Q: Are aid workers and health personnel at risk of human rights abuse?**

**A:** Aid workers are at risk due to the attitude of the conflicting parties. They want to guide and govern all activities. This often compromises the impartial stand of aid workers.

### **Q: The RNA denies use of torture and has condemned the report by the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, Manfred Nowak. What's your view on that?**

**A:** Sadly, the RNA continues to deny responsibility for abuses that have been extensively documented. Actually the situation of torture is much worse than reported. There are many sufferers who are unable or unwilling to report to the competent authority. Why report to the state when they control the army who abused you?

### **Q: How do the state and rebels react to groups like yours, working to improve human rights?**

**A:** Both want to portray a positive image and they tend to conceal the atrocities they indulge in. They are not

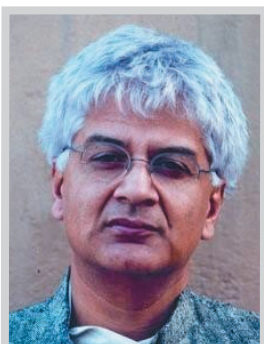


happy with the lobbying, advocacy and dissemination of information conducted by Insec and other such groups.

**Q: Are you worried that the human rights situation will deteriorate?**

A: The state is not in the least concerned about improving the human rights situation. This is substantiated by the introduction of decrees to curb the freedom of civil society and the media. The danger is that the Maoists may not extend their ceasefire if the state does not reciprocate, then we'll be back where we were before September, or it could get worse. The rift and distance between political parties and the king is increasing. The UN and peace organisations are not able to intervene effectively in the conflict. The king continues with stringent action against all democratic forces. The judiciary is not proactive in protecting citizen's fundamental rights. These factors indicate the worst is yet to come as far as human rights is concerned.

## Interview with the editor of the *Nepali Times*, Kunda Dixit



Kunda Dixit, editor of the *Nepali Times*.  
Credit: Naresh Newar/IRIN

The accord signed in New Delhi in late November between Nepal's opposition parties and Maoist insurgents, sets out an agenda to end absolute rule by King Gyanendra. Maoists have pledged to forego violence and accept a constitutional monarchy, if progress towards a new constituent assembly can be made.

Nepali Times Editor Kunda Dixit spoke to IRIN about the circumstances surrounding the accord. Dixit said he felt the conflict was not intractable and that it could be resolved with vision and statesmanship on the part of the king, and with some understanding on the part of the rebels that military conflict was unlikely to lead to them taking over the country.

**QUESTION: What has been the consequence of the ceasefire for both sides?**

ANSWER: It [the unilateral Maoist ceasefire] has been a big relief to the army. It means they do not have to fight and go out on patrols, although they have [issued] press releases saying that they have been out trying to work on intelligence to chase the Maoists and raid their training camps. And that looks like what the Maoists have been doing, a lot of training; not just military training but also political training. The Maoists are worried by the fact that many of their guerillas came in raw and really didn't know what the cause was all about, and degenerated into criminality. So they've been worried by that and they've been working on the political side as well...

**Q: What's the current situation regarding the conflict?**

A: Nepal has the kind of terrain that is ideal for military warfare. This is a country where you can fight a guerilla war forever and neither side will win. And that's been the problem for the army. It's not just the terrain but they are so ill-equipped logistically, with not enough transport helicopters and lorries to get around. So the Maoists have been using the terrain to their advantage, actually quite brilliantly. Therefore what you have in the field is the army confined to the district headquarters inside their barracks. Whenever they do go out, they often can't go without helicopter escorts because of the threat of landmines and ambushes along the highways. What this does is that it leaves large areas of the countryside and districts as a "no man's land". Of course, the Maoists themselves don't have the numbers to be everywhere, but effectively those areas are under their control just because the army is not there.

**Q: Politically, the government didn't respond to the [Maoist] ceasefire. Are they still intent on pursuing a military solution?**

A: Well they are. We say there is a military stalemate in the field. In Kathmandu there is a political deadlock. This deadlock is three-way: between the king and the political parties; between the parties and the Maoists; and between the Maoists and the king. So where do you start untying this knot? Because it's pretty badly stuck. By his 1 February move, the king has basically cut off all ties with the political parties. He said when he took over that he needed to declare a state of emergency and take over power in order to crush the Maoists and restore peace. But all we have seen for the last eight months has been a crackdown on the democratic institutions, a crackdown on the press and basically emasculating the activities of the parties. This has sidelined them and

this sidelining has in fact cost the king very dearly in terms of popular support. And it has removed the buffer that he always had between himself and insurgents. Now he's responsible for everything that goes wrong and after the ceasefire...what that did was paint the king even more into the corner with the army. They couldn't respond.

The only legitimacy the king had for his 1 February move was if he could have restored peace. But when the Maoists declared a unilateral ceasefire, he basically had the rug pulled from under him. So there is no way he could have come out and said "ok, we reciprocate with the ceasefire" because that would have made him look very defensive. The army and palace have come out looking like warmongers, whereas the Maoists look like they are the ones that want compromise and a peace process.

**Q: There are people in the UN and the humanitarian field who feel that Nepal is on the edge of a humanitarian abyss, and any number of different factors might conspire to push it over. You've travelled extensively across the country; what's your impression and can you imagine a situation whereby there would have to be a major type of humanitarian intervention?**

A: Well I can understand why the UN is trying to pre-empt a big humanitarian disaster here because they've been accused elsewhere of not doing things soon enough, whereas here the UN is actually ahead of the curve. There are things the UN could do now that would prevent a disaster in the future. But having said that, I think Nepal has always been on the brink of a humanitarian crisis, even before this war started. Look at our maternal mortality rate, the number of children who die. We've always had a huge humanitarian crisis and the insurgency has just made matters worse. And the lack of governance. For centuries the neglect of the countryside by the capital and its political elite has led to this situation. And now if the world wants to help, really the help is needed to tackle the first problem, which is to end the insurgency and then maybe look at the background humanitarian crisis that was always there in Nepal.

**Q: When you say the world could help by tackling the insurgency, what realistically could you see undertaken?**

A: I think India is the critical factor here. What we've seen after 1 February is Britain, the US and the Europeans coordinating their policies towards Nepal through India. This has been a direct result of the king's takeover. I think a more engaged approach by all of them to pressure the rebels as well as the king and the army towards a negotiated solution is the way forward. If you talk to moderates on both sides, among the Maoists and the army, they tell you there is no military solution. We could be fighting for another 30 years and no one will win. So what's the point? Let's fix it up now and get it over with and have peace so that the Nepali people don't have to suffer another 30 years.

Actually, the real bone of contention, the things that they're fighting over, is not really that intractable. It's not yet an ethnic war, it's not communal strife, it's not a huge conflagration or genocide. It can be resolved. And at the bottom of it is how much power the king should have. I think that can easily be solved with a bit of vision and statesmanship on the part of the King, and perhaps some understanding on the rebel side that violence and conflict is not going to get them anywhere...

**Q: To what extent do you think the economy has become a war economy? If so, to what extent has that helped to perpetuate the conflict?**

A: It's a chicken and egg situation. There was always a shortage of resources here to tackle the problems that we have. Money, even when available, was not being spent because of bad governance. So when the military machine took away an even larger proportion of the money that was supposed to be there for education, health, transportation and infrastructure – all that was diverted to buy more weapons to keep the war machine going. That made it even more difficult to provide development. That's the crux of the problem now because how are you going to find the resources to deal with the problems that used to be there even before the war started? And then of course the embargo on aid by various donors is also beginning to be felt.

The military budget has grown two and half times in the last five years and the army says it wants more. We can't afford it. The country could never afford it, even to start with, now even less so.

**Q: Where is Nepal going to be in six months' time?**

A: If you look at the best case scenario, that is, how it should go, then this should be that the constitutional forces should be on one side. These are the people who believe that the 1990 constitution is still the framework in which the country can go forward: constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary democracy and a grassroots decentralised system of governance. Perhaps the constitution will need tinkering with and will need reforms, but that would be the basis on which it would work and once these two are put in place – the political parties and a constitutional monarch – then that would put pressure on the Maoists to come in.

However, the problem has been, especially after 1 February, that the king's move has made this alliance of the constitutional forces highly improbable, and the parties, out of sheer desperation, have tried to shake hands with the Maoists. Despite the last 10 years of bad blood between the Maoists and political parties, they are willing to go and shake hands. The head of the UML [the Communist Party of Nepal, Unified Marxist-Leninist faction] [has talked to] the Maoists and said that they have come to some sort of compromise agreement.

Ultimately I think that the party leadership is still trying to scare the king with these tactics, and ultimately it would still be in their own best interest and in the monarchy's best interest for the parties and the king to unite. But the longer this stalemate drags on and the king perpetuates the perception that he's out to grab power and take the country back to pre-1990 absolute monarchy days, then I'm afraid it's going to push the parties into the Maoist fold with some kind of anti-monarchy alliance resulting. And the parties are also responding to a huge wave of republicanism especially among the younger cadre. They really can't be seen to be close to a king who is out to grab power. So they are caught in a bind.

**Q: What is the perspective of most people in Nepal?**

A: Ninety-nine percent of Nepali people don't want this war. They don't want to have anything to do with it and yet they are victims. The people realise that this is just a power struggle between the revolutionaries who are outdated in their ideologies, and a monarchy that wants to take the country back three decades. They are just caught in the middle. Remember these are long-suffering people who suffered before the conflict. They are just suffering more. The conflict is just another crisis they are facing. But they are taking it in their stride. It's the rulers here in the capital who need to understand that they can't take on this fight in the name of the people for much longer, because in the end they will be the ones who will be thrown out.

### Interview with the Royal Nepalese Army's former spokesman, Brigadier-General Deepak Gurung



Royal Nepalese Army's former spokesman,  
Brigadier-General Deepak Gurung.  
Credit: Naresh Newar/IRIN

It was only in 2001 that the Royal Nepalese Army was finally brought out of its barracks to quell the violent Maoist rebellion that started in 1996. But since its deployment, officially to provide security and protect civilians as well as to confront the rebels, it has been constantly criticised for violating human rights. Many local and international agencies, including the United Nations, have published reports of Royal Nepalese Army (RNA) involvement in illegal detention, extrajudicial killing, disappearance, torture and other human rights abuses.

In an interview with IRIN, the RNA's spokesman Brigadier-General Deepak Gurung, said progress had been made towards reducing human rights abuses by the military. He also said the military were committed to assisting in finding a political solu-

tion to the current crisis.

**QUESTION: The UN and several human rights groups have been critical of a lack of respect for human rights by the army. Is this the case?**

ANSWER: We were deployed early in November 2001. In late 2001, 2002 and some portions of 2003, we had some human rights violations reported against us, about our soldiers. But since then we have improved on our human rights record and we've disseminated training to our low-level commanders. So, we are improving on that scenario. Any soldier, irrespective of their rank, committing violations, will be punished by military law. That is why we have been able to improve our human rights record.

**Q: But there has also been also criticism that sentences against soldiers committing human rights abuses have been lenient.**

A: Criticisms will be there but whatever the military court has decreed has been followed.

**Q: During our recent visit to the key border city of Nepalganj, your colleagues in the military were quite angry with some recent reports by the UN on recent military activities. Is that justified?**

A: This must have been due to [Special Rapporteur of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights on Torture] Dr Manfred Nowak's report. He talked to some soldiers and used the phrase "systematic torture", which is totally wrong. It is not systematic but there may be individual cases of torture. But then if anyone commits a

mistake and we come to know of it, then we will investigate the case and court martial him.

**Q: So you can categorically say that accusations about systematic torture within the RNA are absolutely false?**

A: "Systematic" was absolutely false. Like I said, there might be some individual cases only.

**Q: The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has still not resumed its visit to places of detention within army barracks. Why do you think this is happening?**

A: The barracks are open for their [ICRC] visit, the National Human Rights Commission [NHRC] and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR]. As far as I know, there is no restriction and all places are open for them. If they are not visiting, then I don't know why.

**Q: We know that Nepali soldiers have been involved around the world in UN-sponsored peacekeeping activities. It has been suggested by some UN officials that unless the human rights record of the RNA improves, their involvement might be in jeopardy.**

A: Our human rights record has definitely improved and we are trying to improve more. It's our national foreign policy that we participate in UN peacekeeping missions and our troops have been doing very well whether in Sierra Leone, Congo or even Burundi. So I don't see the reason why we won't be continuing in our job.

**Q: If your record is improving as you say, why are there still reports of ongoing human rights abuses by the military?**

A: There are many misconceptions regarding the reports. People don't visit us and they rely on others [for information]. If our troops carried out an operation in a particular area, they can't stay in that place for long because they are far from their base. When these human rights organisations visit these places to investigate alleged abuses, they don't meet the military forces but only meet the locals who are affected by the operations. So definitely, they become biased against the military. I don't say that all are false. Some could be true also but they are mostly exaggerated. But I don't think our record is that bad.

**Q: The RNA has also started human rights monitoring. So what impact is that having on promoting human rights among Nepali soldiers?**

A: The new cells mainly record violations and carry out investigations. At the same time, the RNA cooperates with human rights agencies like the ICRC, the UN, and the NHRC, and carries out training for commanders at all levels. The ICRC has a human rights package and comes here and conducts training. These cells will be soon upgraded at brigadier level and will have many branches so that records improve.

**Q: There are reports accusing the army of supporting and arming the vigilante groups.**

A: This is totally false. The army does not support any vigilante group. The villagers have themselves formed their own committees, called self-defence or village-defence committees, and the army has nothing to do with these at all. The most important thing is we have not provided any weapons to them. Whatever the villagers have done is on their own and we have nothing to do with it.

**Q: If the Maoists agree to extend the ceasefire, is it possible that the army might also agree to reciprocate?**

A: The important thing is that they have to stop their other activities, like stop abducting teachers and students from schools and villages, as well as stop extortions. First they have to be clear what they want to do. What we have found is they are recruiting, training and planning big offensives, despite the current ceasefire.

**Q: Do you have resources to settle this conflict militarily?**

A: To be decided militarily, it requires a lot of resources, many helicopters, manpower and time. The best way is not military but through a political solution, keeping in mind the resources required.

**Q: Is it the strategy of the military to pursue a negotiated settlement?**

A: Well, we are just a weapon of the government, and the government uses us to contain the Maoists and force them to negotiation. And that is what we are trying to do. We are trying to restore peace and security in the country.

## 4. Special testimonies - Testimony by a victim of Maoist torture

The Maoist rebels, like the army and police, have been accused of human rights abuses by human rights groups and those civilians who have suffered at their hands.

'Maniram' (not his real name) told IRIN he was working as a village teacher until April 2005, when a group of Maoist militants abducted him from his house and detained him for nearly a month. They said his brother, a member of the Maoists, had deserted them, and held Maniram responsible for persuading him to leave.

Maniram spoke to IRIN about the mental and physical torture he experienced during his detention.

"I had not seen my brother for many years after he joined the Maoist party of his own free will. It was only when I got abducted by the militants that I found that he had deserted the rebels. It was around 06:00 in the morning when a group of armed militants came to my house in Ghetna, that's about one day's walk from Khalanga [a town in Rukum district], and asked me to walk with them. I was very frightened that this would be the end of my life and I did not know why I was being abducted. They made me walk for a whole day and finally in the evening [we] reached Jipu village.

At around 22:00, the rebels dragged me to a room where 11 of their leaders were sitting around a table. One of them started hitting me when I told them I had nothing to do with my brother's desertion of their party. The beating lasted for hours. I constantly told them that I was innocent but they again battered me with heavy logs.

It was almost five hours later that I realised I had fainted. When I woke up, I was bleeding all over my face and body. Realising that there would be more torture, I gave up and told them what they wanted to hear. I admitted that I helped my brother surrender to the security forces to live an ordinary civilian life. After that I was locked in a dark room for 28 days. I was handcuffed for 24 hours a day. I never saw the sunlight all this time. They used to throw food in the room and [I] was not even allowed to go out for toilet.

I was given food twice a day, every 12 hours. I knew that I would die living like this as I believed there was no hope of being released. I noticed that the door to the room where I was being kept was not very strong, so I broke out of the door around 21:00 one night. I ran all the way down to Khalanga and went straight to the police post, getting there about seven hours later. By then it was almost morning. There [too] I was interrogated and detained for one night. But the police released me after that and gave me food.

With help from the unified command of the police and army, I was given a job as a teacher in the local high school, where I am still in hiding as the Maoists are still looking for me. All I want is justice and an apology from the Maoist leaders for torturing me for no reason. My parents were in total shock. I was afraid I would never see my young sons and wife. Luckily I am alive today but I don't know for how long. The Maoists are out to get me, I know that."

## Testimony by a victim of torture at the hands of the army

Shivering with fear and pain, wounds all over his face and body, it is hard for Anoj (not his real name) to recall the torture he was subjected to at the hands of Nepal's security forces inside the army's main barracks in the capital, Kathmandu. Looking feeble and ill, he may not live long if he fails to get proper medical treatment.

The period since 1 February 2005 when King Gyanendra assumed direct rule of the Himalayan kingdom has been characterised by the widespread arrests of political activists, human rights defenders, trade unionists and journalists - the government's apparent aim to prevent protest against the takeover.

Local human rights organisations estimate that more than 3,000 people have been arrested since 1 February, many of them been held in preventive detention.

Anoj says he believes it was a phone call from an enemy of his family to the security forces, that led to his arrest on suspicion of being a Maoist insurgent. In July 2005, he says, he was brutally battered, pounded, punched, caned and given electric shocks until he collapsed.

"I was sleeping when six or seven soldiers came into our flat early one morning. My brother-in-law was nearly shot when he asked why they were arresting me. As soon as I was dragged inside a van, they tied my hands and blindfolded me. They pushed me down onto the floor of the vehicle. Then, one of the soldiers started wrenching my stomach and pounded my head. Another grabbed my testicles so hard that I still feel the pain. They kept on battering for another 30 minutes – after that I could not scream anymore, I fainted.

At the barracks, they put a clip on my ear and began administering electric shocks while shouting that I was a Maoist worker. I fainted again. When I woke up, they started caning me with bamboo sticks and forced water into my mouth and nose. They made me lie flat on the floor and they took turns to step over my stomach and punched my mouth so many times that I had to vomit blood many times.

They tortured me for four hours until the evening. They offered biscuits but I could not eat as my mouth had swollen due to the beatings and electric shock. The next morning, around six, security personnel came and started kicking me while I was asleep. They told me that they would not torture me if I confessed that I was a Maoist.

The pain was so unbearable that I pleaded with them to just shoot me dead. After a few days the interrogators returned, said that they had made a mistake and that I was an innocent civilian. They said I would be released, but threatened to arrest and torture me again if I reported the incident to anyone. As soon as I got home, I fainted again in my sister's arms. Shocked at my condition, my sister immediately took me to a local private clinic for emergency treatment.

I want justice! Why did they have to torture me for no reason? It's just too much to bear. Five months later I can hardly sleep due to the pain in my stomach and head. My fingers are all numb. I can barely walk. Two months ago, I again received a call reminding me not to tell anyone what had happened to me. It really scares me to think that they will come back and kill me."

## 5. Links & References

The following section outlining links and references is divided into several categories.

- links to local and international news sources that provide up-to-date coverage of the situation in Nepal
- reports and reference materials on various aspects of the conflict
- human rights advocacy and monitoring organisations
- international organisations active in Nepal
- miscellaneous links

### News coverage of the situation in Nepal

Nepal News  
<http://www.nepalnews.com>

Kantipur Online  
<http://www.kantipuronline.com/>

Nepali Times  
<http://www.nepalitimes.com>

Himal South Asia  
<http://www.himalmag.com/>

Radio Sagarmatha  
<http://www.radiosagarmatha.org/>

The Himalayan Times  
<http://www.thehimalayantimes.com/>

The Kathmandu Post  
<http://www.kantipuronline.com/paper.php?id=2>

The Rising Nepal  
<http://www.gorkhapatra.org.np/pageloader.php?file=2005/12/18/index>

BBC South Asia  
[http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south\\_asia/](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/)

Inter Press Service News Agency - Asia-Pacific  
<http://www.ipsnews.net/asia.asp>

Reuters AlertNet - Nepal insurgency  
[http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/emergency/NE\\_INS.htm](http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/emergency/NE_INS.htm)

Washington Post - Nepal page  
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/world/asia/southasia/nepal/>

### Official websites

His Majesty's Government of Nepal (English version)  
[http://www.nepalhm.gov.np/index\\_eng.php](http://www.nepalhm.gov.np/index_eng.php)

Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)  
<http://www.cpm.org/>

### Reports and reference material

#### GENERAL:

#### Human Rights Watch report: 'Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Civilians Struggle to Survive in Nepal's Civil War'

[www.hrw.org/reports/2004/nepal1004/](http://www.hrw.org/reports/2004/nepal1004/)

October 2004 report from Human Rights Watch looking at the often untenable choices that civilians in contested areas are forced to make.



#### Nepal Millenium Development Goals - Progress Report 2005

<http://www.undp.org.np/publications/mdg/index.html>



#### Nepal National Human Development Report 2004: Empowerment and Poverty Reduction

[http://hdr.undp.org/reports/detail\\_reports.cfm?view=935](http://hdr.undp.org/reports/detail_reports.cfm?view=935)

The most recent Human Development Report for Nepal.

**Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Nepal**

<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2004/41742.htm>

One of U.S. Department of State's 2004 Human Rights Reports. Outlines human rights abuses by both the Government and the Maoists.

**International Crisis Group Reports on Nepal**

<http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?l=1&id=1265>

Series of reports analysing the conflict, dating from April 2003 to November 2005. Access to reports requires users to complete free registration process.

**Amnesty International Library - Nepal**

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/eng-npl/index>

Extensive list of news, reports and urgent actions.

**Nepal Democracy**

<http://www.nepaldemocracy.org/index.htm>

Provides information on Nepali politics and civil society, including many articles on aspects of the conflict.

**TORTURE AND DETENTION:****Report to the Economic and Social Council by the South Asia Human Rights Documentation Centre (SAHRDC): 'Detention and Torture in Nepal'**

[http://www.unhchr.ch/Huridocda/Huridoca.nsf/e06a5300f90fa0238025668700518ca4/70cb2b7e9ccef755c1256e690039bd34/\\$FILE/G0411646.doc](http://www.unhchr.ch/Huridocda/Huridoca.nsf/e06a5300f90fa0238025668700518ca4/70cb2b7e9ccef755c1256e690039bd34/$FILE/G0411646.doc)

Statement presented to the Economic and Social Council in March 2004.

**INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS:****Report of the joint OCHA/IDP mission to Nepal, June 2004**

<http://www.reliefweb.int/idp/docs/reports/Nepal0604MissionRep.pdf>

**Human Rights Without Frontiers Int. Reports: 'Internally displaced persons in Nepal: the forgotten victims of the conflict' and 'Authoritarian rule in a conflict-ridden country: What comes next?'**

[http://www.hrwf.net/Nepal\\_IDPs\\_HRWFReport\\_July2005.pdf](http://www.hrwf.net/Nepal_IDPs_HRWFReport_July2005.pdf)

[http://www.hrwf.net/Nepal-Report\\_HRWF.pdf](http://www.hrwf.net/Nepal-Report_HRWF.pdf)

Analytical reports of the humanitarian crisis, published July 2005 and February 2005.

**CHILDREN:****Amnesty International report: 'Nepal: Children Caught in the Conflict'**

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engasa310542005>

AI report of July 2005 on the impact of the ongoing conflict on children.

**Watchlist report: 'Caught in the Middle: Mounting Violations Against Children in Nepal's Armed Conflict'**

<http://www.watchlist.org/reports/nepal.report.php>

Report of January 2005 outlining the violations of children's security and rights throughout the conflict in Nepal.

**HIV/AIDS:****'HIV in Nepal: Is the Violent Conflict Fuelling the Epidemic?'**

<http://medicine.plosjournals.org/perlserv/?request=get-document&doi=10%2E1371%2Fjournal%2Epmed%2E0020216>

A report published in August 2005 by Sonal Singh, Edward Mills, Steven Honeyman, Bal Krishna Suvedi, Nur Prasad Pant, analysing the HIV epidemic in Nepal.

**Human rights advocacy and monitoring organisations****Informal Sector Service Centre (INSEC)**

<http://www.inseconline.org/>

Provides immediate reports of human rights abuses in Nepal.

**Amnesty International Nepal**

<http://www.amnestynepal.org/>

Website of the Nepal section of Amnesty International. Outlines AI Nepal's activities, in particular human rights education.





**Child Workers in Nepal Concerned Centre**<http://www.cwin.org.np/>

Advocacy organisation working to protect the rights of the child in Nepal. Established National Resource Centre on Children in Armed Conflict (NR-CIC) in 2003 in recognition of the significant impact of the ongoing conflict on children.

**HimRights - Himalayan Human Rights Monitors**<http://www.himrights.org/>

Organisation that advocates for the advancement of human rights in South Asia, and in Nepal in particular.

**Human Rights and Peace Society**<http://www.peacesocietynepal.org/>

Campaigning group for the promotion of human rights and the initiation of a peace process.

**South Asia Forum for Human Rights**<http://www.safhr.org/>

Regional human rights forum that conducts specific programmes in Nepal.

**International organisations****United Nations Information Platform**<http://www.un.org.np/>

Comprehensive website run by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). Includes links to major reports on the situation in Nepal and to situation updates prepared by the United Nations, and outlines the humanitarian and development work being done by different agencies in the country.

**Nepal Office of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)**<http://nepal.ohchr.org/>

Details of the Nepal Office of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, including the High Commissioner's report on Nepal.

**International Monetary Fund (IMF)**<http://www.imf.org/external/country/NPL/>

Links to information about the activities of Nepal with the IMF.

**World Health Organization (WHO)**<http://www.who.int/hac/crises/npl/en/index.html>

Health-related information on the crisis in Nepal.

**United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Nepal**<http://www.undp.org.np/>

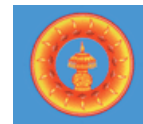
Office of the United Nations Resident Representative and Coordinator in Nepal, Matthew Kahane. Outlines United Nations development activities in the country and links to various UN publications.

**Miscellaneous links:****International Nepal Solidarity Network**<http://insn.org/>

Network pursuing "democratic peace through dialogue". Provides on-line discussion fora, as well as news and analysis. The site banned in Nepal.

**NGO Federation of Nepal (NFN)**<http://www.ngofederation.org/>

A national umbrella organisation of around 2000 member NGOs across Nepal, established to promote social justice, human rights and fair development.

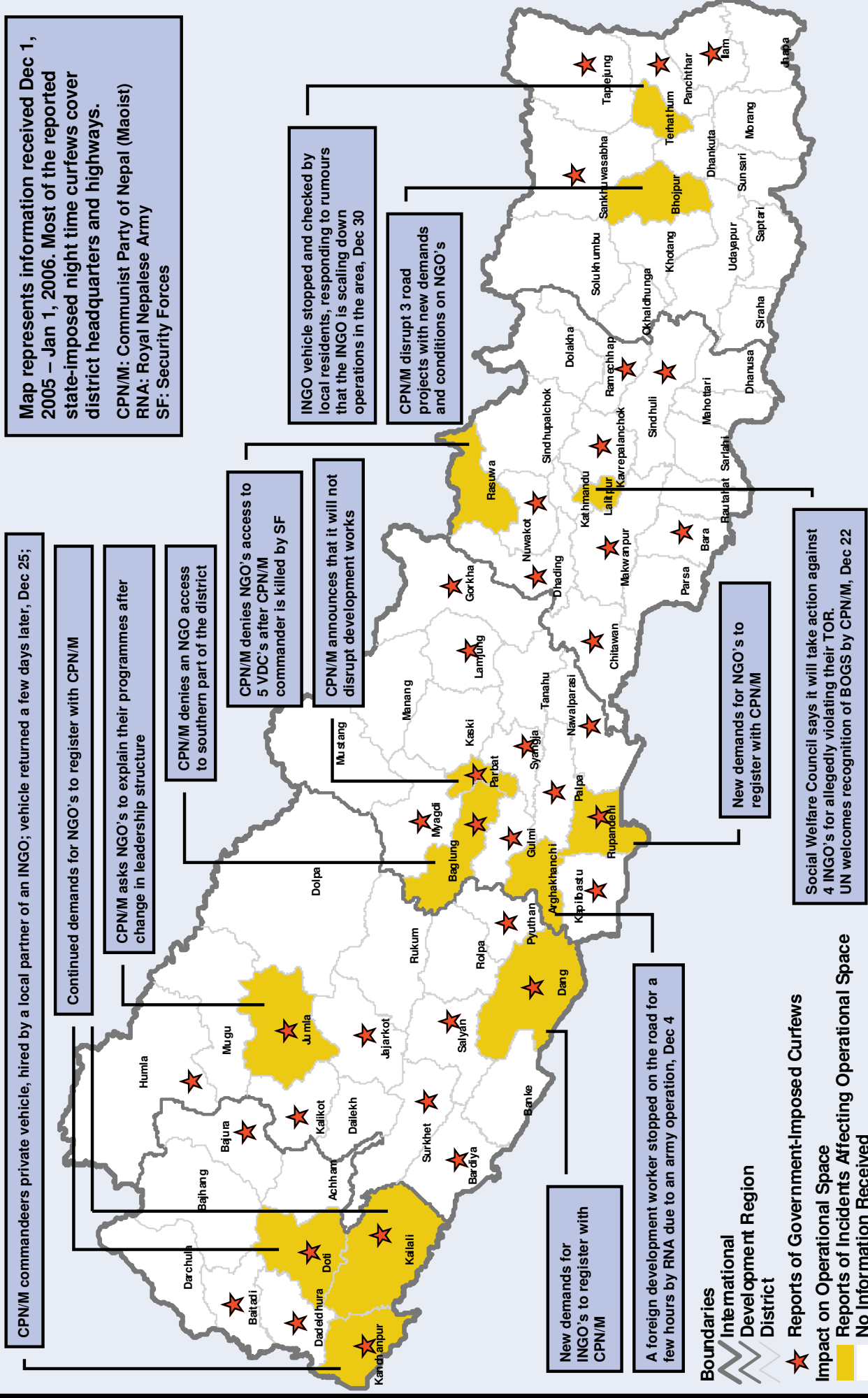


# NEPAL Topography and Access



Data Source: CBS (Census 2001)

# NEPAL Operational Space: Dec. 1, 2005 – Jan. 1, 2006 (End of CPN/M Ceasefire)



50 0 50 100 Kilometers

Last Updated January 5, 2006

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)  
 United Nations, Nepal

Data Source: International and Domestic Media, and Field Reports from UN Agencies, Donors and INGO's

# Contact IRIN

For more information on IRIN activities and funding requirements, please contact the IRIN Coordinator, Ms Pat Banks at the following address:

## **OCHA-IRIN**

c/o P.O. Box 30218, Nairobi, Kenya  
Tel: +254 20 62147  
Fax: +254 20 62129  
Email: [irin@IRINnews.org](mailto:irin@IRINnews.org)

## **Contact Information**

Coordinator, Ms. Pat Banks,  
Tel: +254 20 6213,  
Email: [pat@IRINnews.org](mailto:pat@IRINnews.org)  
Editor-in-Chief, Ms. Catherine Bond  
Tel: +254 20 62147  
Email: [bond@IRINnews.org](mailto:bond@IRINnews.org)

## **Headquarters, IRIN Central & East Africa**

IRIN Horn Of Africa - Nairobi  
UNOCHA House, UN Crescent, Off UN Avenue,  
P.O. Box 30218, Nairobi, Kenya  
Tel: +254 20 62147  
Fax: +254 20 62129 Or 624356  
Email: [irin@IRINnews.org](mailto:irin@IRINnews.org)

## **IRIN Central Asia - Ankara**

Room B03, UN House,  
Birlik Mah, 2 Cadde, 11,06610,  
Cankaya, Ankara, Turkey  
Tel: +90 312 454 1177/75  
Fax: +90 312 495 416  
Email: [irin-asia@IRINnews.org](mailto:irin-asia@IRINnews.org)

## **IRIN Southern Africa - Johannesburg**

3rd Floor, Sandton City Office Towers,  
Rivonia Road, Sandton 2146  
P.O. Box 1617, Parklands, 2121,  
Republic Of South Africa  
Tel: +27 11 895 1900  
Fax: +27 11 784 623  
Email: [irin-sa@irin.org.za](mailto:irin-sa@irin.org.za)

## **IRIN West Africa - Dakar**

Sur La Vdn - Villa N° 9368 Sacré-Coeur 3,  
Bp: 45792 Dakar-Fann, Senegal,  
Code Postale 12523  
Tel: +221 867 27 30  
Fax: +221 867 25 85  
Email: [irin-wa@IRINnews.org](mailto:irin-wa@IRINnews.org)

## **IRIN Liaison Office - New York**

United Nations Plaza,  
New York 10017, USA  
Tel: +1 917 367 2422 or +1 917 367 9228  
Fax: +1 917 367 7002  
Email: [daltonm@un.org](mailto:daltonm@un.org)

## **IRIN Liaison Office - Geneva**

Office A827, OCHA/ESB/IRIN,  
Palais Des Nations,  
8-14 Avenue De La Paix, Ch-121  
Geneva 10, Switzerland  
Tel: +41 22 917 1135  
Fax: +41 22 917 0067  
Email: [joanne@IRINnews.org](mailto:joanne@IRINnews.org)

## **IRIN Middle East - Dubai**

Dubai Humanitarian City, Bldg 4, Dubai,  
P.O. Box 506011,  
United Arab Emirates  
Tel: +971 4 308 1021/22  
Fax: +971 4 1023  
Email: [irin-me@IRINnews.org](mailto:irin-me@IRINnews.org)

## **IRIN Customer Service**

Contact: Gertrude Tah  
Tel: +225 22 40 44 40 ext. 443  
Email: [gertrude@IRINnews.org](mailto:gertrude@IRINnews.org)