

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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*Human Rights in Asia-Pacific: 2019 in Review*

## **Nepal: A year of shrinking freedoms**

Freedoms came under attack in Nepal in 2019 as the government proposed laws to restrict the right to freedom of expression and subject civil society organizations to greater restrictions, Amnesty International said as the human rights organization released its annual report on events in the Asia-Pacific region.

*Human Rights in Asia-Pacific: Review of 2019* published today by Amnesty International delivers the most comprehensive analysis of the state of human rights in the world's largest continent.

“Over the past year, we have seen the country increasingly resort to repressive methods to restrict freedoms. Journalists were arrested simply for doing their jobs, singers were imprisoned solely for the content of their songs, and civil society came under greater pressure,” said Biraj Patnaik, South Asia Director at Amnesty International.

“The government has also failed to deliver on truth, justice and reparations for thousands of victims of crimes under international law and other serious human rights violations committed during the decade-long armed conflict. Migrant workers, a source of prized remittances, were not protected from abusive recruitment practices. And many people who lost their homes during the 2015 earthquake were no closer to finding permanent shelter.”

### **Freedom of expression under attack**

In Nepal, laws like the Electronic Transactions Act 2006 were used to arbitrarily arrest journalists and artists. By the end of the year, three new bills – the Media Council Bill, the Mass Communication Bill, and the Information Technology Bill – were proposed that would further restrict the right to freedom of expression.

The government also proposed amendments to legislation that would undermine the independence of the National Human Rights Commission. The cabinet also proposed a new law that would restrict the activities of civil society organizations and subject them to more stringent monitoring.

“The new bills proposing restrictions on freedom of expression will damage Nepal's regional reputation and violate its international obligations. These bills must be withdrawn or amended immediately to ensure that no one in Nepal is punished for what they peacefully say or write,” said Biraj Patnaik.

## **Transitional justice stalled**

In 2019, there was frustratingly little progress on truth, justice and reparations for thousands of victims of crimes under international law and other serious violations of international human rights law committed during the decade-long armed conflict, 13 years after the state committed to do so as part of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement.

By the end of the year, the government had still not amended the Commission on Investigation of the Disappeared Persons, Truth and Reconciliation Act 2014 as ordered by the Supreme Court in 2014 and 2015.

“The wounds of Nepal’s decade-long conflict can only heal when justice is delivered to the tens of thousands of victims to whom it is owed. In 2020, the government must build upon the limited but important progress made, empower the two commissions overseeing the transitional justice process, and bring existing legislation into line with the Supreme Court’s orders,” said Biraj Patnaik.

## **Migrant workers still being exploited**

Every year, thousands of Nepalese leave the country to seek employment abroad, but these migrant workers still have not been given the protections they need against exploitative recruitment practices in Nepal.

Four years ago, a policy was announced to ensure that all migrant workers are not charged for their work visas or their air tickets to countries of prospective employment. The costs would be borne by the employers. The policy is still not being enforced properly and recruitment agencies in Nepal continue to charge migrant workers exorbitant fees.

“The government happily relies on remittances sent by hundreds of thousands of migrant workers to keep the economy of the country going, but does very little to ensure they are protected from abuse and exploitation at the hands of recruitment agencies. In 2020, the authorities should take decisive steps to implement the existing laws to protect migrant workers,” said Biraj Patnaik.