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FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN NEPAL



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OHCHR-Nepal calls for a fully independent judicial investigation into Belbari killings

OHCHR-Nepal deplores the latest killing of seven unarmed civilians by the Royal Nepalese Army (RNA), in Belbari, Morang District, on 25 and 26 April, and calls for action to ensure that no further such killings occur.

On Wednesday 26 April, OHCHR-Nepal deployed teams to Belbari, Itahari and Dharan to begin investigations into these shootings. OHCHR-Nepal has confirmed that one civilian woman was shot dead on 25 April by RNA soldiers, and that a further six civilians were killed on 26 April when RNA soldiers fired numerous rounds at demonstrators who had gathered to protest the alleged rape and killing of this woman the previous day. More than 20 others are confirmed to have been injured in this shooting.

OHCHR-Nepal has found no evidence to support the RNA account that shots were fired from among the demonstrators on 26 April or that civilians were armed or presented an imminent threat to the lives of members of the RNA.

This is the second time in less than ten days that RNA soldiers have opened fire with live ammunition on civilians in the Eastern Region, following the shooting at demonstrators at Chandragadhi, Jhapa District on 19 April, which resulted in two fatalities and at least 13 civilians suffering bullet injuries.

This latest fatal shooting of civilians by members of the RNA highlights the urgent need for proper accountability of members of the security forces when the human rights of civilians are violated. OHCHR-Nepal reiterates that violations by members of the military against civilians must be properly dealt with through civilian justice mechanisms, comprising transparent investigations, prosecutions before an ordinary court of law and appropriate punishment.

OHCHR-Nepal is therefore calling on the civilian authorities to establish, at the earliest opportunity, a fully independent judicial investigation into the shootings at Belbari. This investigation should establish the facts of what occurred on 25 and 26 April, and make recommendations for accountability mechanisms for the punishment of those responsible, as well as measures to ensure that such violations are not repeated.

“It is essential, as part of Nepal’s current transition, that a new ethos of accountability is established. The shooting of unarmed civilians is inexcusable, and it is vital in order to establish public trust in the rule of law that an appropriate investigation be completed and sanctions imposed on those responsible. Those under investigation should be suspended immediately,” said Ian Martin, Representative of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in Nepal.

OHCHR-Nepal is continuing to investigate all killings in the course of the 19 days of public demonstrations across the country, and will make its findings available to any official inquiry established by the new government.

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