

## HUMAN RIGHTS LEADER AND AP PARTNER ASSAULTED IN NEPAL

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Washington, DC: A leading Nepalese human rights activist and Advocacy Project partner has been severely beaten at his home in Kathmandu by a group of armed men from the Nepalese security forces, in an apparent attempt to intimidate Nepal's vocal human rights community at a time of growing insecurity in the country.

Dinesh Raj Prasain, coordinator of the Collective Campaign for Peace (COCAP), was attacked at his home on January 13, and the event has triggered a major outcry among civil society in Nepal. In a January 15 press release, 27 prominent human rights activists appealed for international solidarity, and demanded a full and public investigation by the Royal Nepal Army and the National Human Rights Commission.

'(This attack) has exposed the insensitivity of the government towards the safety and protection of citizens,' states the release. 'It is a naked attack on all of us human rights activists who are always committed to advocate human rights of the people.'

COCAP is a community-based network of some 40 community-based groups working to rebuild Nepali society in the face of a bitter conflict between the central government and Maoist insurgents. The Advocacy Project arranged for Kate Kuo, a Georgetown student, to work with COCAP during the summer of 2003.

The attack on Mr. Prasain was clearly vicious and premeditated. According to Mr. Prasain's own account, about six men knocked on his door just after midnight on January 13, refused to provide identification, and then proceeded to break into his residence.

'One of the men pulled out a revolver and said he would shoot me if I did not open the door. I felt very fearful, and closed the door and latched it from inside. They started pulling and kicking the door. I did not know what to do, and in the frenzy, I ran towards the kitchen, planning to jump off the veranda. But within seconds, they broke the door, caught me and started beating me severely. They beat me up on my face, head, stomach, back and thighs with fists and kicks. I guess at least four of the six persons beat me. They beat me continuously, pulling me kitchen to corridor, corridor to kitchen.

'They asked why I tried to escape, if I had not some thing to hide. I told them that I was fearful that they were professional criminals, and kept on insisting that they show me their ID cards. One of them showed his ID but blocked his name.'

Mr. Prasain's 72-year-old father and nephew, who witnessed the search and assault, stated that one member of the group carried a 'long gun.'

Following the attack, COCAP commissioned a fact-finding team from seven COCAP member organizations. The team, which included the Vice President of the Nepal Bar Association, concluded that the assailants were from the security forces because according to eyewitnesses, they were led by an unidentified 'major.' Given that no other houses were searched in the area, the sole objective was clearly to assault Mr. Prasain.

Thousands of Nepalis have died since the Maoist insurgency erupted in Nepal in 1996. A brief ceasefire collapsed last August, leading to renewed violence and abuse. On 12 November 2003 the UN issued a press release in which three UN human rights monitors expressed 'profound concern over reports that dozens of individuals are being detained secretly in Nepal and are therefore at risk of suffering torture and other forms of ill-treatment.' Amnesty International has documented the disappearance of 250 persons by the security forces during the fighting. The Maoist rebels have also been blamed for disappearances and abuses.

While the recent attack on Mr. Prasain would seem to be a blatant attempt to intimidate one of the country's leading peace activists, it may also be linked to Mr. Prasain's own forthright stand against NGO corruption. Several local NGO leaders objected strongly to a December 2003 article in which Mr. Prasain criticized Nepalese NGOs.

After the article was published, Mr. Prasain received threats on his life. He feels it is possible that the security forces were falsely told that he was harboring Maoists, and were even bribed to attack him.

In the view of COCAP members, such a possibility only increases the need for a full and public investigation.

- Read the blog of 2003 AP intern [Kate Kuo](#).