

## NEPALESE CIVIL SOCIETY LAUNCHES INTERNATIONAL NETWORK

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Washington, DC: The Nepalese peace movement has launched a major new initiative to mobilize international civil society behind a campaign to end the conflict in Nepal that has claimed thousands of lives and devastated the economy.

The International Nepal Solidarity Network (INSN) was created on October 16 in Kathmandu at the offices of the Collective Campaign for Peace (COCAP), a partner of AP. The initiative was then enthusiastically endorsed by a grassroots peace conference, the People's Initiative for Peace, which met on November 6 and attracted a thousand delegates from 60 of Nepal's 75 districts.

Meanwhile, COCAP plans to hold public hearings tomorrow - one day before International Human Rights Day (December 10) - in 12 districts of Nepal to protest violations by Government forces and the Maoist rebels.

COCAP hopes to bring Nepalese solidarity groups in Europe and North America into the new network and use email and the Internet to keep the network active and cohesive. COCAP's Coordinator Dinesh Prasain received strong support for the idea during a recent visit to Finland, Germany and Denmark. COCAP has asked AP to promote the new network in the US.

This burst of activism by Nepal's civil society reflects impatience at continuing abuses by the government and the Maoist rebels, and the refusal of both parties to negotiate a peace in the face of growing international pressure.

In an unexpected rebuke to the Government, the US Congress recently authorized \$5,000,000 of military aid for Nepal on condition that the Government respects habeas corpus orders from the Supreme Court, cooperates with the National Human Rights Commission to resolve disappearances, and grants the Commission unimpeded access to all places of detention. It also calls for Nepalese security forces to stop using torture. This year, the UN Working Group on Disappearances asked the Government of Nepal to explain 32 new disappearances - more than any other country in the world.

The US bill, which is equally critical of Maoist abuses, has encouraged human rights activists because the Bush Administration had previously given unqualified support to the Nepalese government on the grounds that Nepal could become a haven for terrorists.

COCAP itself has 25 member organizations, including women's groups and dalit (untouchables) and has made good use of AP's support. AP sent an intern to work with COCAP in 2003, and launched an online campaign in support of Dinesh Prasain earlier this year after he was beaten late at night by unidentified security officials.

The petition raised 758 signatures, which were handed into the Nepalese embassy in Washington. In an interview Prasain credited the publicity with bringing about an end to such unauthorized night-time government operations.

- Visit COCAP's [website](#).
- For information about the INSN contact [Dinesh Prasain](#).
- Read [Katherine Kuo's](#) 2003 blogs.