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INDIA: United Nations experts alarmed by continuing abuses in Manipur

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UN OHCHR (04.09.2023) – UN experts* today raised the alarm about reports of serious human rights violations and abuses in the Northeast State of Manipur in India, including alleged acts of sexual violence, extrajudicial killings, home destruction, forced displacement, torture and ill-treatment.

The experts pointed to an “inadequate humanitarian response” in the wake of the grave humanitarian situation in Manipur following the latest round of community conflict between the predominantly Hindu Meitei and the predominantly Christian Kuki ethnic communities that erupted in May 2023.

By mid-August 2023, an estimated 160 persons had reportedly been killed, mostly from the Kuki ethnic community, and over 300 injured. The conflict also reportedly resulted in tens of thousands of people from the communities being displaced, thousands of homes and hundreds of churches being burnt down, as well the destruction of farmland, loss of crops and loss of livelihood.

“We are appalled by the reports and images of gender-based violence targeting hundreds of women and girls of all ages, and predominantly of the Kuki ethnic minority. The alleged violence includes gang rape, parading women naked in the street, severe beatings causing death, and burning them alive or dead,” the experts said.

“It is particularly concerning that the violence seems to have been preceded and incited by hateful and inflammatory speech that spread online and offline to justify the atrocities committed against the Kuki ethnic minority, particularly women, on account of their ethnicity and religious belief,” they said. “We are further alarmed by the reported misuse of counterterrorism measures to legitimise acts of violence and repression against ethnic and religious minorities.”

The experts said recent events in Manipur were another tragic

milestone in the steadily deteriorating situation for religious and ethnic minorities in India.

“We have serious concerns about the apparent slow and inadequate response by the Government of India, including law enforcement, to stem physical and sexual violence and hate speech in Manipur,” the experts said.

The experts welcomed the fact-finding mission conducted by lawyers and human rights defenders in Manipur and the follow-up by the Supreme Court of India on the situation in Manipur, though the response could have come in a timelier manner. They urged the Supreme Court to continue monitoring the response of the Government and other actors, with a focus on justice, accountability, and reparations. “We are also concerned about reported criminalization and harassment of human rights defenders documenting the cases,” they said.

They urged the Government to step up relief efforts to those affected and to take robust and timely action to investigate acts of violence and hold perpetrators to account, including public officials who may have aided and abetted the incitement of racial and religious hatred and violence.

****The experts: Reem Alsalem, Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences; Michael Fakhri, Special Rapporteur on the right to food; Irene Khan, Special Rapporteur on the protection and promotion of freedom of opinion and expression; Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering***

terrorism; Balakrishnan Rajagopal, Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing; Nazila Ghanea, Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief; Morris Tidball-Binz, Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; Mary Lawlor, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders; Margaret Satterthwaite, Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers; Fernand de Varennes, Special Rapporteur on minority issues; Ashwini K.P., Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance; Paula Gaviria Betancur, Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons; Alice Jill Edwards, Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; Claudia Mahler, Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons; Dorothy Estrada Tanck (Chair), Ivana Radačić (Vice-Chair), Elizabeth Broderick, Meskerem Geset Techane and Melissa Upreti – Working Group on discrimination against women and girls.

*Special Rapporteurs and Working Groups are part of what is known as the **Special Procedures** of the Human Rights Council. Special Procedures, the largest body of independent experts in the UN human rights system, is the general name of the Council's independent fact-finding and monitoring mechanisms. Special Procedures mandate-holders are independent human rights experts appointed by the Human Rights Council to address either specific country situations or thematic issues in all parts of the world. They are not UN staff and are independent from any government or organisation. They serve in their individual capacity and do not receive a salary for their work.*

Photo : Manipur Violence – PTI Torching houses in Manipur

Further reading about FORB in India on HRWF website

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