

## **Ongoing violence and human rights violations in Kashmir: the urgent need for truth and justice**

Tensions in the streets of Srinagar are running high. Public protest and strikes have paralyzed the Kashmir valley again after a series of incidents occurred in which innocent youth have been killed. Within a spate of 10 days, 3 young boys have been killed in separate incidents that happened during protests. Last Sunday afternoon during a funeral procession another teenager was killed by a bullet in the neck and four others sustained bullet injuries in old city of Srinagar. Police and paramilitary CRPF troopers opened fire on the funeral procession of Muhammad Rafiq Bangroo who himself had died on Saturday night after allegedly being beaten by the CRPF.



*(Picture of grieving family of Muhammad Rafiq Bangroo and the funeral procession on Sunday)*

Back in April the Kashmir valley was already in turmoil when it was discovered that three Kashmiri youth had been killed by the Indian army in a 'fake encounter'; that is an encounter that is staged by the military in which innocent civilians are kidnapped and killed and falsely labeled to be militants. The police in Kashmir, for the first time, have charged a Major and three other military personnel with criminal conspiracy, kidnapping and murder. Fake encounters are common in Kashmir, and according to the International People's Tribunal on Human Rights and Justice in Kashmir (IPTK) Indian soldiers are awarded large sums of cash and promotions if they kill a militant, which encourages the practice.

However, not only the young men but also young women in Kashmir suffer and are often sexually harassed and killed by state forces. It is now more than a year ago when the Kashmir valley was rocked by protest due to the Shopian murder case in which 2 young women, a student called Asiya and her pregnant sister-in-law Neelofar, were gang raped and found dead in a shallow stream. To date the inquiry of the CBI (Central Bureau of Investigation based in Delhi) ruled out rape and murder and rather insisted that the women had drowned in the shallow stream. The CBI also announced it would press charges for fabricating evidence against the doctors and the lawyers who in an earlier investigation stated that the women had been gang raped and murdered. De Kashmiri barr association has strongly rejected the findings of the CBI report and have vowed that they will continue to fight the conclusions in the CBI's report.

Protest marches to remember the one year anniversary of this horrific event were suppressed by the authorities. However despite intimidation by army and police, commemorations were held by civil society organizations in the old city to protest the killing and to show solidarity with the victims. For example, the All Jammu Kashmir Student Front (AJKSF) members staged peaceful demonstration and sit-in against the denial of justice to Shopian victims. They demanded justice for the bereaved family and punishment to the perpetrators of the gruesome act. Demonstrators made banners to lodge their protest and lit candles to express their sympathies with the victims and to signify hope that those involved will be brought to justice.



*(Picture of AJKSF's sit-in demonstration for justice of Shopian victims)*

Encouraging news is that a team from Amnesty International for the first time in 22 years has visited Kashmir. Amnesty International has in the past expressed their concern over rights abuses in Indian-occupied Kashmir. It has also sought repeal of laws like Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), Disturbed Area Act and Public Safety Act. In its 2004 report, the AI has strongly criticized the governments use of the draconian laws and laws like the AFSPA and Disturbed Area Act which it says "instigate and encourage fake encounters, custodial killings and enforced disappearances." Amnesty also indicated that they want to reinvestigate human rights violations that have been sanctioned by AFSPA and Disturbed Area Act. They claim that, in the period between their last research of 2004 and the current one in 2010, the human rights situation has hardly- if at all improved and that the human security situation for civil society was dramatically poor in the Kashmir state.