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PRESS RELEASE

Nepal: Government Putting Journalists at Risk

ARTICLE 19, the Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) and Freedom Forum (FF) strongly condemn the Government of Nepal's intentions to use journalists as informants, to help implement its Special Security Plan. This would significantly increase the already seriously hazardous working environment for journalists. It is also contrary to international standards, as well as the *Agenda for Change*, launched by ARTICLE 19, FNJ and FF in February 2009. We urge the Government of Nepal to drop this idea and, instead, to take the necessary steps to protect journalists from attacks by unidentified armed groups.

"The Government's plan is opportunistic and irresponsible," said Dharmendra Jha, Chairperson of FNJ. *"Threats and attacks against, and even murder of journalists are rampant in Nepal and to propose to use journalist as informants is at best grossly negligent,"* he added.

Key problems with involving journalists in the Special Security Plan include:

- This would seriously undermine the role of an independent media in a democracy.
- It would also undermine the independence and professionalism of individual journalists.
- It would seriously increase the risk of attacks against journalists and media outlets, whereas there is an imperative need to take action to reduce this risk.

Recommendation No. 24 of the *Agenda for Change* states, in part: "The government should be more proactive in fulfilling its obligation to protect journalists and media property, including by allocating greater resources and attention to this, particularly in conflict areas." Attempting to use journalists as security informants is also a breach of code of conduct issued by Nepal Press Council.

ARTICLE 19, FNJ and FF urge the Nepali authorities to withdraw immediately any proposal to use journalists as informants to execute the Special Security Plan. We also call on the authorities to take all reasonable measures to promote the safety and security of journalists and media outlets.

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- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, which guarantees freedom of expression. The Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) is the umbrella organisation of the journalists in Nepal. Freedom Forum is a Nepalese human rights organisation working for press freedom and the right to information.