

# Report finds 'patterns of abuse' by security forces

## Report on Punjab taken to the NHRC

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**NEW DELHI:** A report by the Physicians for Human Rights and the Bellevue-New York University School of Medicine Programme for Survivors of Torture has found that the law enforcement agencies have engaged in consistent patterns of abuse that included repeated arrest, harassment, extortion, and torture of their family members.

The report, done at the request of Ensaaf, a non-profit organisation based in Santa Clara, has been brought to the attention of the National Human Rights Commission by the Committee for Information and Initiative on Punjab (CIIP) in the ongoing hearings in the Punjab Mass Cremations case, which are part of the proceedings of a public interest litigation pending before the Supreme Court.

The report is based on 131 interviews with family members of victims killed and illegally cremated by security forces in Punjab. The interviews were conducted in Amritsar by a team of psychologists, psychiatrists, and primary care internal medicine physicians during May and June 2005. It concluded that information gathered in the course of their assessment has revealed credible allegations of torture and other serious crimes by law enforcement officials that appear to warrant investigation and adjudication. It recom-

mended that considerations of compensation to family members should take into account not only the loss of relatives, but also the emotional and financial impacts of such losses and the impact of the pattern of intentional abuse by law enforcement officials among family members.

Recalling their traumatic experiences, 75 per cent of those interviewed in the report, said authorities harassed them prior to and after the death of their relatives.

About half of those interviewed reported being physically assaulted by authorities and almost two third (63 per cent) of those interviewed reported at having been arrested at some point.

### Torture alleged

Forty eight per cent of those interviewed said their relatives had been tortured at least once prior to their final arrest or death.

Fifty two per cent stated that they had learned that their relative was tortured by the police while in custody during the time period between their final arrest and subsequent death. The torture reported by participants was typically described as being inflicted by the police, but other government officers like the military were occasionally identified as having engaged in violence.